To Jane McNab
From His Lordship 1st Jan 1900

LOCHINVAR

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

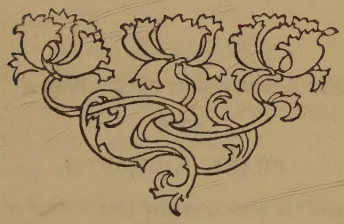
THE STICKIT MINISTER
THE RAIDERS
THE LILAC SUNBONNET
MAD SIR UCHTRED
THE PLAYACTRESS
BOG-MYRTLE AND PEAT
THE MEN OF THE MOSS-HAGS
SWEETHEART TRAVELLERS
CLEG KELLY
THE GREY MAN
LADS' LOVE

KATE AND WAT ON THE ISLAND OF FIARA

LOCHINVAR

BY

S. R. Crockett



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and the Book contains also a Map of the Islands of Suliscanna and Fiara drawn by the Author.

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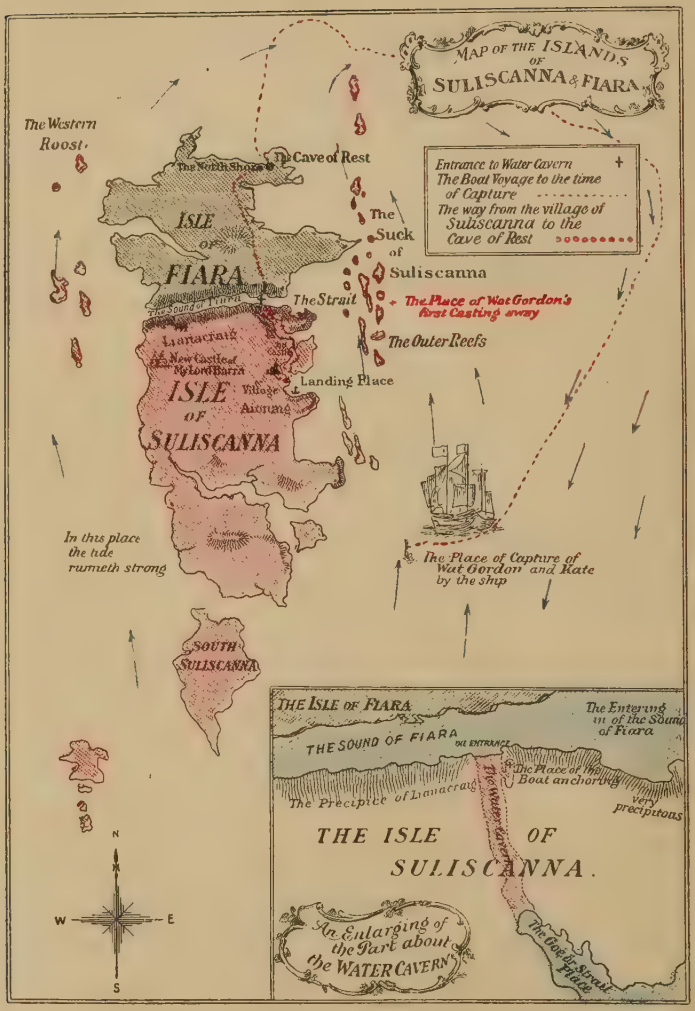
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LOCHINVAR

FOREWORD TO THE TALE, TELLING WHAT BEFELL AT THE HOUSE OF BALMAGHIE IN THE YEAR OF GRACE 1685, AND HOW MY LADY WELLWOOD PARTED TWO YOUNG LOVERS.

"AYE," said Mistress Crombie, housekeeper to Roger McGhie, Laird of Balmaghie, a considerable house in the south-lying and better cultivated part of the wild lands of Galloway, "aye, indeed, ye may well say it, Alisoun Begbie. It is a wondrous and most ungentle thing when the doe seeks the hart—panting and brayin' for a man, as the Guid Buik says. And saw ye ever sic feathers?—I declare they nearly soopit the floor. My Lady Wellwood, or no my Lady Wellwood, I trow she didna come ridin' by the hoose o' Balmaghie only to ask the time o' day, upsetting besom that she is!"

During this harangue Alisoun Begbie was clattering about among her bottles and dishes in the stone-flagged, slate-shelved still-room which constituted her pantry. A few minutes before she had cried mischievously out of the window to Lang Wat, the new under-gardener of Balmaghie, to the effect that "siccan a guid-lookin' chiel should be seen oftener about the house—but that she, Alisoun Begbie, was not wanting anything to do with the likes of him. She could get plenty of lads, and it was weel-kenned that the Glenkens' folk aye took up wi' their ain folk at ony rate,"

But as soon as the "bauchles"[1] of Mistress Crombie, the shrill-tempered housekeeper, were heard scuffling up the stairs, Alisoun made a pretty warning face of silence at Lang Wat, and tossed her head to intimate that some one approached from behind; so that, without making any verbal answer, the under-gardener resumed his occupation of the moment, which was the pruning and grafting of sundry rose-bushes—the pride and care of Mistress Kate McGhie, the "young leddy" of the great house of Balmaghie.

"Na, 'deed, Alisoun Begbie," cried Mistress Crombie once more, from the cheek of the door, "believe me when I tell ye that sic a braw city madam—and a widow forbye—doesna bide about an auld disjaskit rickle o' stanes like the Hoose o' the Grenoch withoot haeing mair in her head than just sending warnings to Clavers aboot the puir muirland folk, that keep their misguided conventicles up ayont there, and pray a' nicht in the lirks o' the hills and the black hags o' the peat-mosses."

"Aye, ye may say so, 'deed, mistress," agreed Alisoun, keeping an eye upon the window of her pantry, through which she could see Lang Wat bending his back among the rose-bushes. Spite of his good looks, he had proved himself a singularly flinty-hearted fellow-servitor, and ill to set to the wooing. But Alisoun had still hopes of him. She had succeeded with some difficult—indeed, almost hopeless—cases in her time, and the very unresponsive nature of the young Glenkens' gardener stirred her ambition to brighter and more inviting glances, as well as to gayer and ever daintier ribbons.

But in spite of both loving looks and lovers' knots,

[1] Certain heel-less and shapeless slippers, characteristic of the district.

Lang Wat neither succumbed nor yet appeared so much as conscious of her regard. Truly a marvellous young man—such as had never come within the sphere of the comely handmaiden's influence before.

"Weel, I'se warrant my lady needna set her cap at our maister," said Alisoun Begbie, willing to agree with the powerful and cantankerous housekeeper: "Na, Roger McGhie o' Balmaghie has his wits aboot him. Surely it is a terrible thing when a woman so far forgets hersel' as to set her cap for a man."

And pretty Alisoun glanced at the silver salver she was polishing, in order to be sure that her silken snood was in its proper place, and that the braids of her hair were drawn back smoothly and daintily from her brow. Being reassured on these points, she resumed the salver with renewed complaisance. Lang Wat was now standing meditatively outside, quite near the house, and with his face turned towards her window. He was leaning upon his spade; any moment he might look up. Pretty Alisoun Begbie breathed upon the silver with a certain seductive pouting of her lips, rubbed the place clear, breathed again upon it, and last of all frowned alluringly at it —for the very excellent reason that one of her former admirers had incautiously told her that such frowning became her mightily. But in spite of all, Lang Wat remained rapt in abstractest meditation. At which Alisoun Begbie tossed her head and frowned again—not this time for picturesque reasons, but in good earnest.

"He micht at least have kissed his hand, the silly cuif!" she said, half to herself, looking resentfully at the impervious under-gardener of Balmaghie.

"What!" cried Mistress Crombie, "kissed his hand, indeed, ye daft-speaking, licht-headed hizzie!

I hope that my maister has something else to do than to gang kissin' his hand to a' the high-flyin' madams that likes to come aboot the hoose—wi' their auld guidmen hardly cauld in their coffins, and as much paint on their impudent faces as wad serve for the body o' a trail cart. Kiss his hand to her, indeed! Na, na, set her up; a deal less than that will serve her."

A stir was heard at the top of the stairs which led up from the still-room, among the cool recesses of which this conversation had been proceeding between Mistress Crombie and her favourite assistant.

"Dear sirs, that's the maister himsel', I declare," said the housekeeper, looking cautiously up, "and dressed in his Sunday breeks—mercy on us!—And his best coat wi' the new lace on the collar, and the cuffs that I laid aside for the next burial or siclike festivity. But—Lord preserve us!—here on a Wednesday he maun gang and put them on! The man's surely gane clean mad. He shall sup sorrow like sowens for this yet, and that will be seen."

"Maybe he has been kissin' mair than his ain hand," said Alisoun Begbie, slyly. She was still smarting from her rebuke by the housekeeper; besides which, Lang Wat would not look up.

Mistress Crombie started as if she had been stung.

"Save us!" she cried, "do ye think so? Then a' our good days aboot the hoose o' the Balmaghie are numbered! O, the bonny place, where I thocht to end my days wi' a guid maister and a kindly! O, women, women—what hae ye no to answer for, upsettin' a' plans, stirrin' up a' ill, pu'in' doon a' guid! Eh, Alisoun, but what a paradise the world wad be wi' only men in it, and no a woman frae end to end o't—*forbye mysel'*—whatna Gairden o' Eden wad that no make?"

But the eyes of Alisoun Begbie were fastened on a

certain shaded nook among the rose-bushes, wherein a pretty enough comedy was being enacted; though, be it said, one little to the taste of the still-room maid. Mistress Crombie, had she been observant, might have discovered abundant cause to find fault with her maid's diligence and attention to the details of her duty during the next half hour. But luckily for Alisoun Begbie, that good though suspicious lady had betaken herself indignantly upstairs. There with haughty head tossing in the air and a certain ominously-aggrieved silence, she proceeded to meditate upon the other details of her master's attire—his Sunday shoes with silver buckles, his ribbons of pale blue at the knee, and especially the grand new wig of the latest court fashion, which Colonel John Graham of Claverhouse had brought all the way in his saddle-bag from Robin Rae's, the periwig maker in the Lawnmarket, the last time he rode to Edinburgh to consult with the Lords of the Privy Council.

Now, what Alisoun Begbie watched behind the rose-bushes was this.

She saw the under-gardener, "Lang Wat o' the Glenkens," as he was called about the house, in close and kindly converse with Mistress Kate McGhie, the only daughter of the house and heiress of her father's wide estates. She had come, a tall and graceful maid attired in white, lightfoot down a shady garden path, the sunshine and the leaves together flecking her white dress with wavering shadows, her dark, shapely head thrown a little back, her chin tilted somewhat defiantly in the air, and her broad summer hat a-swing in her left hand. Fitfully she hummed a tune, but whenever she forgot the words (which was very often) the song dropped, and without the

least break of continuity, proceeded on its way as a whistle. And in either case the sounds proceeded, so thought the under-gardener, from the prettiest and most appetising mouth in the world.

Indeed, as soon as Mistress Kate came within hearing distance of him, Lang Wat promptly swept his broad bonnet from his head in salute, and told her so. Which, when one thinks of it, was a considerable liberty for an under-gardener to take.

But the lady received the compliment not amiss, being to all appearance neither elated nor astonished. Was she not Kate McGhie of Balmaghie, and had she not been accustomed to be told that she was beautiful as long as she could remember? Consistent and continuous admiration had become familiar to her as the air she breathed, and had done her as little harm. It seemed to Kate as natural that she should be assured that she was winsome, as to be told that she had a good appetite. And the information affected her equally in either case. Since her very tenderest years there had been but one dissentient voice in this chorus of universal love and admiration—a certain small boy from the Glenkens, a laird's son, one Walter Gordon of Lochinvar, who had come to the house of Balmaghie on a visit with his father, and had enshrined his dissent in a somewhat memorable form.

For, by the common bruit of the country-side, the girl had been denominated, while yet but a child with great hazel eyes that promised dangerous things, and a tossing fleece of curls—the Pride of Balmaghie. And the maid herself, when asked her name, was accustomed to reply frankly—

> "I is little Kate McGhie—
> What everybody loves."

But this same Gordon lad from the Glenkens, scornful in the pride of half a dozen years of superior age, never heard the phrase without adding his own contemptuous disclaimer, "Little brute, *I* don't love her."

Nevertheless, the time came when the scorner recanted his renunciation. And that time was now, under the garden trees of the house of Balmaghie and the jealous eyes of Alisoun Begbie. For "Lang Wat o' the Glenkens," under-gardener to Roger McGhie of Balmaghie, was none other than Walter Gordon, the young laird of Lochinvar, fallen into ill-odour with the King's Government—both in the matter of the wounding of my Lord of Wellwood, and as being suspected of companying and intercommuning with the wild Whigs of the hills. For the times bore hard on all such as were of doubtful loyalty, and fines and confiscations were the least those had to expect who refused to side openly with the blusterous riders and galloping compellers of the King's forces. The blaze of muskets in face of a stone wall, the ever busy rope in the Grassmarket of Edinburgh (where during two brisk years of the "Killing Time" the hangman needed a new "tow" every month from the Town Council, and the pay of an additional assistant whenever "he was overthrong with the hanging of so many Westland men")—these and other symptoms of troublous times sent many well-disposed and innocent folk into hiding.

But it was not alone the superior advantages of Balmaghie as a hiding-place which had brought Wat Gordon of Lochinvar thither in search of shelter. It might rather be the sweeping, darksome under-curve of Kate McGhie's eyelashes, and the little specks of light which swam and sparkled in the depths of her

hazel eyes, like the shredded gold in that rare liqueur which John Scarlett, the famous master-at-arms, had brought back with him last year from Dantzig.

Not that Wat Gordon was very deeply or seriously in love. He dallied and daintied with it rather. True—he thought about love and the making of it night and day, and (for the time being) his ideal and liege-lady was the young mistress of the house of Balmaghie.

And Kate McGhie, knowing him for what he was, and being (unlike her father, but like most of the women-folk of Scotland) a sympathiser with the oppressed of the Covenant, showed no small kindness to the under-gardener.

She was a maiden left much alone. She was at the age when love is still an insubstantial rosy dream, yet few youths of her own quality were ever encouraged to come about her father's house. So that her pity and her admiration were the more easily engaged on behalf of the handsome and unfortunate young laird, who told her at least ten times a day (when he had the chance) that he was as willing as any Jacob to serve seven years, and seven to the back of that, in the hope of such a Rachel. For even before he began to do more than play with true love, Wat Gordon had a gift of love-making which might have wiled a bird off a tree.

Yet, for all that, when he came to practise on Kate McGhie, he wiled in vain. For the girl was buttressed and defended by a lifetime of admiration from all who came about her—by her father's adoration, the devotion of every man, woman, and child about the house of Balmaghie, and, above all, by the repute of reigning beauty athwart all the country-side. So, though she might think well enough of Wat Gordon,

that handsome exile from his heritages and lordships, now in picturesque hiding as her father's under-gardener, she was (so at least she told herself) in no danger of permitting that liking to develop into any feeling more dangerous or more exacting.

So these two fenced, each of them in their own way, right gallantly with lightsome love; while the love that is not lightsome, but strong as death, smiled out upon them from behind the rose-bushes, and lay in wait for one and the other.

Presently, while they were yet talking and Alisoun Begbie still carefully observant of them, the front door of the house of Balmaghie opened wide, and the laird himself came down the steps, looking a little dashed and shamefaced, for Mistress Crombie had ushered him to the door with ironic state and ceremony.

"Dootless your honour is on his way to pay duty to the King's Commissioner at Kirkcudbright," she said, with pointed sarcasm which the shy laird did not know well how to parry. "But ye hae forgotten your pearl studs in your sark, and the wee hangie-swordie o' the court that will no draw oot o' its scabbard, nor so muckle as hurt a flea."

"I thank you, mistress," said Roger, not daring to look at his too faithful domestic, "but I go not so far afield as to see His Majesty's Commissioner. 'Tis but the matter of a visitor whom we must expect this forenoon. See that some collation is prepared for her."

"*Her!*" ejaculated Mistress Crombie, with an indescribable accent of surprise, not unmingled with scorn. "*Her*—we are to hae the company o' a great lady, nae doot. And this the first that your humble servant and housekeeper has heard o' the matter! 'Collation,' quo' he? Whatna dinner do ye think

can be got ready between eleven and twa o' the clock on a Wednesday, wi' a' the lasses at the washin' except Alisoun Begbie, and nocht in the larder forbye twa pookit chuckie-hens, that came frae the Boat Craft less than half an hour since?"

"But, surely, these will do very well," said Roger McGhie, with increasing nervousness. "'Tis only my Lady of Wellwood, who rides over from the Grenoch."

For in truth he had been afraid to mention the matter to Mistress Crombie, and so had put off till it was too late—as the manner of men is.

"I forgot to acquaint you with the fact before; it—ah—it altogether escaped my memory," said he, beginning to pull his gloves on as he descended the steps.

"But ye didna forget to put on your Sunday claes, laird Balmaghie," cried the privileged domestic after him, sarcastically; "nor did your best silken hose nor your silver buckles escape your memory! And ye minded brawly to scent your ruffles wi' cinnamon and rosemary. Ye didna forget ony o' thae things—that were important, and maitters o' life and death, as one might say. It only escaped your memory to tell your puir feckless auld housekeeper to mak' ony provision for your dainty dames and court leddies. Ou aye, it maitters little for the like o' her—Marion Crombie, that has only served ye for forty year, and never wranged ye o' a fardin's worth. Dinna waste a thought on her, puir auld woman, though she should die in a hedge-root, so long as ye can hae a great repair o' powdered weemen and galloping frisk-me-denties to come ridin' aboot your hoose."

But whatever else Mistress Crombie might have had to say to her master, was lost in the clatter of hoofs and the stir and bustle of a new arrival.

Up the avenue came a bold horsewoman riding a

spirited bay, reining it like a man as she stayed her course on the river gravel before the front door and sent the stones spraying from its fore-feet at the halt. The new-comer wore a plumed hat and the riding dress of red, which, together with her warm sympathies with the "persecutors," caused my Lady Wellwood to be known in the country-side as "The Scarlet Woman." She was a handsome dame of forty or mayhap a little more; but, save for the more pronounced arching of her haughty nose and the rounding curves of her figure, she might well have passed for ten or twelve years younger.

The laird of Balmaghie went eagerly forward to meet his visitor. He took gratefully enough the hand which she reached to him a little indulgently, as one might give a sweetmeat to a child to occupy its attention. For even as he murmured his welcomes, the lady's eyes were certainly not upon her host, but on the erect figure of his under-gardener, who stood staring and transfixed by the rose-bush which he had been pruning.

"My Lady Wellwood," said Roger McGhie, "this is indeed an honour and a privilege."

"Who may this youth be?" interrupted the lady, imperiously cutting short his sober courtesies and pointing to Lang Wat of the Glenkens.

"It is but one of my gardeners; he has lately come about the house," answered Roger McGhie, "a well-doing carle enough, and a good worker. But hark ye, my lady, perhaps a wee overfond of Whiggery and such strait-lacedness, and so it may be as well to give his name the go-by when John Graham comes this way."

My Lady of Wellwood never took her eyes off the gardener's face.

"Come hither and help me to dismount," she said, beckoning with her finger.

Wat Gordon came reluctantly enough, dragging one foot after the other. He realised that the end had come to his residence among the flower-closes of Balmaghie, and that he must e'en bid farewell to these walks and glades as of Paradise, upon which, as upon his life, the hazel eyes of Kate McGhie had lately rained such sweet influences. Meanwhile the laird stood meekly by. The caprices of great court ladies were not in his province, but, having set out to humour them, he was not to be offended by the favour shown his servitor. He had heard of such things at Whitehall, and the memory rather kindled him than otherwise. He felt all the new life and energy which comes of being transported into a new world of new customs, new ideals, and even of new laxities.

Wat gave my Lady Wellwood his hand in the courtliest manner. The habit and gait of the under-gardener seemed to fall from him in a moment at the sound of that voice, low and languorous, with a thrill in it of former days which it irked him to think had still power to affect him.

"You have not quite forgotten me, then, sweet lad of Lochinvar?" asked the Duchess of Wellwood softly in his ear. For so in the days of his sometime madness she had been wont to call him.

"No," answered Wat sullenly enough, as he lifted her to the ground, not knowing what else to say.

"Then meet me at the head of the wood on my way home," whispered the lady, as she disengaged herself from his arm, and turned with a smiling face to Roger McGhie.

"And this is your sweet daughter," she murmured caressingly to Kate, who stood by with drooping eye-

lids, but who nevertheless had lost no shade of the colloquy between Wat Gordon and her father's guest.

The Lady Wellwood took the girl's hand, which lay cold and unresponsive in her plump white fingers. "A pretty maid—you will be a beauty one day, my dear," she added, with the condescension of one who knows she has as yet nothing to fear from younger rivals.

To this Kate answered nothing. For her flatterer was a woman. Had the Duchess of Wellwood been a man and condescended to this sort of left-handed praise, Kate would have flashed her eyes and said, "I have not seldom been told that I am one already." Whereupon he would have amended his sentence. As it was, Kate said nothing, but only hardened her heart and wondered what the great court lady had found to whisper to the man who, during these last months, had daily been avowing himself her lover. And though Kate was conscious that her heart sat secure and untouched on its virgin throne, it had, nevertheless, been not unpleasant to listen to the lad. For of a surety Wat Gordon told his tale wondrously well.

Roger McGhie conducted the lady gallantly through the garden walks towards the house. But she had not gone far when she professed herself overcome by the heat, and desired to be permitted to sit down on a rustic seat. She was faint, she said; yet even as she said it, the keen eye of Kate McGhie noted that her colour remained warm and high.

"A tass of water—nay, no wine," she called after the Laird of Balmaghie; "I thank you for your courtesy."

And Kate's father hastened away a little stiffly to bring it. She knew that his Sunday shoes irked him.

It served him right, she thought. At his age he ought to know better—but there remained the more important matter of the under-gardener.

"Come and sit by me, pretty one," said the Lady Wellwood, cooingly, to Kate.

The "pretty one" would infinitely rather have set herself down by the side of an adder sunning itself on a bank, than shared the woodland seat with the bold horsewoman of Grenoch.

"Ah! sly one," she said, "I warrant you knew that your under-gardener there, that handsome lad, was not the landward man he seemed."

She shook her finger reproachfully at her companion as she spoke.

Kate blushed hotly, and then straightway fell to despising herself for doing it, almost as much as she hated my lady for making her. Lady Wellwood watched her covertly out of the corner of her eyes. She cultivated a droop of the left eyelid on purpose.

"I know that he is proscribed, and has a price set on his head," Kate said quietly, looking after Wat with great indifference as he went down the avenue of trees.

"And do you know why?" asked the Duchess somewhat abruptly.

"No," answered Kate, wondering at her tone.

"It was for wounding my late husband within the precincts of Holyrood," said Lady Wellwood.

But Kate McGhie's anger was now fully roused, and her answer ran trippingly off her tongue.

"And was it for that service you spoke so kindly to him just now, and bade him meet you at the head of the wood as you went home?"

The Duchess stared a little, but her well-bred calmness was not ruffled.

"Even so," she said placidly, "and for the further reason that Walter Gordon was on his way to see *me* on the night when it was his ill fortune to meet with my husband instead."

"I do not believe it," cried the girl, lifting her head and looking Lady Wellwood straight in the eyes.

"Ask him, then!" answered the Duchess, with the calm assurance of forty answering the chit of half her years. For at first sight my lady had envied and hated the clear blushful ivory of the girl's cheek and the natural luxuriance of her close-tangled curls. And since all the art of St. James's could not match with these, she was now getting even with Kate in ways of her own.

The girl did not speak. Her heart only welled within her with contradiction and indignation.

"Or if you will not do that, sit down half an hour hence and read your book in the little arbour by the end of the avenue, and you will hear news. Whether you may like them or not is another question. But at all events, you shall not have cause to say again that a Duchess of Wellwood lied."

Kate rose and walked away without answering a word. She cared no jot for Wat Gordon, so she told herself. He was nothing to her, save that she desired his safety, and had risked much to give him shelter. Yet this Duchess of Wellwood—that woman, of whom the gross popular tongue whispered commonly the most terrible things! Had Lochinvar made love to her? Was he to meet her at the end of the avenue? She could not believe it. It was indeed no matter if he did. What did she care? Go to the arbour, become an eavesdropper—not for any man alive, least of all for Wat Gordon! Thank God, she had a tongue in her head, and was not afraid to

ask Wat Gordon, or any living soul, whatever she desired to know.

But after a little hesitation, she went upstairs to her chamber, and denying herself the listening of the ear, she listened with her eyes instead. For she watched my Lady Wellwood being helped into her saddle right courteously by her father. She saw her looking down at him the while with a glance professionally tender, a glance that lingered in the memory by reason of the quiver of an eyelid and the pressure of a soft reluctant hand. And Roger McGhie bowed over her plump fingers as though he had been bidding farewell to some angelic visitant.

For the first time in her life Kate McGhie despised her father. And, lo! to hurt her heart yet more, and to convince her of the ultimate falsity of all men, there was Wat, his tall figure overtopping the hawthorn hedge, walking briskly in the direction of the pine wood at the end of the avenue.

Kate went downstairs with a set, still face. She would not cry. She did not care. She was only bitterly disappointed with the whole race of mankind, nothing more. They were all no better than so many blind fools, ready to be taken in by a plausible tongue and a rolling eye. A fine figure of a woman, and—Lord, where was the best of them?

But her Wat—and with the Duchess of Wellwood; she could not believe it! Why, she might be his —well, hardly that—but his mother at the very least.

Not that she cared; she had her work to think about; and Kate McGhie went down to the little suckling lamb she had fed daily with warm milk out of a wooden spoon, and which, though now almost of the greatness of a full-grown sheep, still leaped and

fawned upon her. She fetched her pail and mixed pet Donald's midday meal.

Outside the garden wall the lamb was standing, bleating indignant petitions, and there Katie McGhie fed him with a gradually swelling heart. As the last drops disappeared into the moist black muzzle, Kate put her arms about the woolly neck and sobbed aloud.

"Oh, Donald, Donald, my lamb, you are the only friend I have! I do not love anybody else and no one in the world loves me. But I am not sorry—I am glad, and I will not cry. It is not that I love him, Donald; but, oh! he might not have done it!"

That same evening Wat Gordon, as was his custom, came walking slowly through the garden pleasaunce. Kate McGhie met him by the rose-bush he had been pruning that morning.

"Is it true," she asked, looking at him bravely and directly, "that you are in hiding because, when going to visit the Duchess of Wellwood, you encountered her husband instead?"

"This much is true," answered Wat promptly, "that while passing down the Canongate one snowy night, my cousin, Will Gordon of Earlstoun, and I were beset by a band of ruffians in the pay of the Duke of Wellwood, and that in defending ourselves the Duke himself was hurt."

"And when you went out of your lodging that night, was it to walk with your cousin, or to visit my Lady of Wellwood in her boudoir?"

Wat Gordon took his breath hard. The manner of the question left him no escape with honour. But he could not lie. And he would offer no excuse.

"I went out to visit my Lady Wellwood!" he said, very shortly.

a woman to take among her intimates the style of her husband's surname), sat on a high-backed chair by the oriel window. She had the kind of sunny hair which it is a pleasure to look upon, and the ripples of it made crisp tendrils about her brow. Her face underneath was already sweetening and gaining in reposefulness, with that look of matronhood which comes early to patient, gracious women, who would yet venture much for the man they love. And not once nor yet twice had Maisie Lennox dared all for those whom she loved—as has, indeed, elsewhere been told.

But, all unexpected of the hasty visitor, there was yet another fair girl looking up at him there in that quaint, dusky-shadowed room. Seated upon a low chair, and half leaning across the knees of Mistress Maisie, set wide apart on purpose, there reclined a maiden of another temper and mould. Slender and supple she was as willow that sways by the water-edges, yet returning ever to slim, graceful erectness like a tempered blade of Damascus; above, the finest and daintiest head in the world, profiled like Apollo of the Bow, with great eyes that were full of alternate darkness and tenderness, of tears and fire; a perfectly chiselled mouth, a thing which is rarer and more excellent than the utmost beauty of splendid eyes—and sweeter also; a complexion not milk and rose like that of Maisie Lennox, but of ivory rather, with the dusky crimson of warm blood blushing up delicately through it. Such was Kate McGhie, called Kate of the Dark Lashes, the only daughter of Roger McGhie of Balmaghie, a well-reputed Galloway gentleman in the country of Scotland.

As Walter Gordon came bursting in his im-

SEATED UPON A CHAIR AND HALF LEANING ACROSS THE KNEES OF MISTRESS MAISIE, THERE RECLINED A MAIDEN OF ANOTHER TEMPER AND MOULD

petuous fashion into his cousin's room, his sword clashing about his feet and his cavalry spurs jingling against his boot-heels, he was stopped dead by this most pleasant sight. Yet all he saw was a girl with her head resting upon her own clasped hands and reclining on her friend's knee, with her elbows set wide apart behind her head—while Maisie's hand played, like a daring swimmer in breaking surf, out and in among the soft crisps of hair, which were too short to be waves and too long to be curls. And this hair was of several curious colours, ranging from black in the shadows through rich brown into dusky gold where the sun's light caught it lovingly, as though he had already begun to set over the sand-dunes into the Northern Sea. As Wat stood there his fingers tingled to touch. It seemed somehow a squandering of human happiness that only a girl's hand should smooth that rich tangle and caress those clustering curls.

Walter Gordon of Lochinvar had flung himself into the little room in Zandpoort Street, ripe to pour his sorrows into the ear of Maisie Lennox. Nor was he at all forgetful of the fact that the ear was an exceedingly pretty one. Most devoutly he hoped that Will, his very excellent cousin and Maisie's good husband, might have been kept late at the religious exercises of the Regiment of the Covenant—as that portion of the Scotch-Dutch auxiliary force was called which had been mostly officered and recruited from among the more militant exiles and refugees of the Scottish persecution.

But as Lochinvar came forward somewhat more slowly after his involuntary start of surprise, his eyes continued to rest on those of the younger girl who, remained thus reclined on her gossip's lap. She had

not moved at his entrance, but only looked at him very quietly from under those shadowy curtains which had gained her the name of Kate of the Dark Lashes. Then in a moment Wat set his hand to his breast suddenly, as if a bullet had struck him upon the field of battle.

"Kate!" he cried in a quick hoarse whisper, as though the word had been forced from him.

And for a long moment the young soldier stood still and speechless, with his eyes still fixed upon the girl.

"Walter, mind you not my dearest friend and gossip Kate, and how in old sad days in the dear, far-away land we there underwent many things together?" asked Maisie Lennox, looking up somewhat doubtfully from her friend's face into that of Walter Gordon.

"I did not know—I had not heard——" were all the words that the young squire of dames could find to utter.

"Also there were, if I remember aright," the young matron went on, with that fatal blundering which sometimes comes to the kindest and most quick-witted of women, "certain passages between you—of mutual friendship and esteem, as it might be."

Then, with a single swift movement, lithe and instantaneous as that of a young wild animal which has never known restraint, Kate of the Dark Lashes rose to her feet.

"Walter Gordon of Lochinvar," she said, "is a Scottish gentleman. He will never be willing to remember that which a lady chooses to forget."

But Lochinvar himself, readiest tongue in wit-play as well as keenest blade when the steel clashed in sterner debate, on this occasion spake never a word,

For in that moment in which he had looked upon Kate McGhie resting her beautiful head upon her clasped hands in her friend's lap, he had fallen from the safe heights of admiration into the bottomless abysses of love.

While the pair were still standing thus face to face, and before Kate sat down again in a more restrained posture on the low-cushioned window-seat, Will Gordon strode in and set his musket in a corner. He was habited simply enough in the dark grey of the Hill Folks' regiment, with the cross of St. Andrew done in blue and white upon his breast. His wife rose to kiss him as he entered, and then, still holding her by the hand, he turned to the tall, slim girl by the window.

"Why, Kate, lass, how came the good winds to blow you hither from the lands of mist over the sea?" he asked.

"Blasts of ill winds in Scotland, well I wot," said Kate McGhie, smiling at him faintly, and holding out her hand.

"Then the ill Scots winds have certainly blown us good here in Holland," he answered, deftly enough, in the words of the ancient Scottish proverb.

But the girl went on without giving heed to his kindly compliment.

"The persecution waxes ever hotter and hotter on the hills of the south," she said, "and what with the new sheriffs, and the raging of the red-wud Grier of Lag over all our country of Galloway, I saw that it could not be long before my doings and believings brought my easy-tempered father into trouble. So, as soon as I knew that, I mounted me and rode to Newcastle, keeping mostly to the hills, and avoiding the highways by which the King's soldiers come and

go. There, after some wearisome and dangerous waiting, I got a ship to Rotterdam. And here I am to sorn upon you!"

She ended with a little gesture of opening her hands and flinging them from her, which Wat Gordon thought very pretty to behold.

"You are as welcome to our poor soldier's lodging as though it had been the palace of the Stadtholder," answered William Gordon—with, nevertheless, a somewhat perplexed look, as he thought of another mouth to be fed upon the scanty and uncertain pay of a private in the Scottish regiments of the Prince.

While his cousin was speaking Wat Gordon had made his way round the table to the corner of the latticed window farthest from Kate, where now he stood looking thoughtfully upon the broad canal and the twinkling lights which were beginning to mark out its banks.

"Why, Wat," cried his cousin Will, clapping him lovingly upon the shoulder, as he went past him to hang up his blue sash on a hook by the window, "wherefore so sad-visaged, man? This whey face and dour speechlessness might befit an erewhile Whig gardener of Balmaghie, with his hod and mattock over his shoulder; but it sets ill with a gay rider in Douglas's dragoons, and one high in favour in the Prince's service."

Lochinvar shook off his cousin's hand a little impatiently. He wanted nothing better than just to go on watching Kate McGhie's profile as it outlined itself against the broad, shining reach of water. He marvelled that he had been aforetime so blind to its beauty; but then these ancient admirations in Scotland had been only lightness of heart and a

young man's natural love of love-making. But Walter Gordon knew that this which had stricken him to the heart, as he came suddenly upon the girl pillowing her head on her palms at Maisie's knee, was no mere love-making. It was love.

"Who were on duty to-day at headquarters?" Wat asked, gruffly enough.

"Who but Barra and his barbarians of the Isles!" William Gordon made answer.

Wat stamped his foot boyishly and impatiently.

"The Prince shows these dogs overmuch of his favour," he said.

Will Gordon went to the chamber door and opened it. Then he looked back at his wife.

"Come hither, sweetheart," he said. "It is pay-day, and I must e'en give thee my wages, ere I be tempted to spend them with fly-by-night dragoons and riotous night-rakes like our cousin here. Also I must consult thee concerning affairs of state—thy housewifery and the price of candles belike!"

Obediently Maisie rose and followed him out of the room, gliding, as was her manner, softly through the door like water that runs down a mill-lade. Kate of the Dark Lashes, on the contrary, moved with the flash and lightsome unexpectedness of a swallow in flight. Yet now she sat still enough by the dusky window, looking out upon the twinkling lights, which as they multiplied began to be reflected on the waters of the long, straight canal.

For a while Wat Gordon was content silently to watch the changeful shapeliness of her head. He had never seen one set at just that angle upon so charming a neck. He wondered why this girl had so suddenly grown all wonderful to him. It was strange that hitherto he should have been so crassly

blind. But now he was perfectly content only to watch and to be silent; so that it was Kate who first felt the necessity for speech.

"This is a strange new land," she said thoughtfully, "and it is little wonder that to-night my heart is heavy, for I am yet a stranger in it."

"Kate," said Wat Gordon, in a low, earnest tone, leaning a little nearer to her as she sat on the window-seat, "Kate, is there not, then, all the more reason to remember old friends?"

"And have I not remembered?" answered the girl swiftly, without looking at him. "I have come from my father's house straight to Maisie Lennox—I, a girl, and alone. She is my oldest friend."

"But are there, then, no others?" said the young man jealously.

"None who have never forgotten, never slighted, never complained, never faltered in their love, save only my sweet Maisie Lennox!" returned the girl, as she rose from her place and went towards the door, from behind which came the soft hum of voices in friendly conference.

Wat took two swift steps forward as if to forestall her, but she slipped past him, light as the shadow of a leaf windblown along the wall, and laid her hand on the latch.

"Will not you let me be your friend once again after these weary years?" he asked eagerly.

The tall girl opened the door and stood a moment with the outline of her figure cut slimly against the light which flooded the passage—in which, as it grew dark, Maisie had lighted a tiny Dutch lamp.

"I love friends who never need to be friends *again!*" she said in a low voice, and went out.

Left to himself, Wat Gordon clenched his hands

in the swiftly darkening room. He strode back to the window pettishly, and hated the world. It was a bad world. Why, for no more than a hasty word, a breath of foolish speech, a vain and empty dame of well-nigh twice his age, should he lose the friendship of this one girl in all the world? That other to whom he had spoken a light word of passing admiration, he had never seen again, nor indeed wished to see. And for no more than this, forsooth, he must be flouted by her whom his very soul loved! It was a hard world, a bad world—of which the grim law was that a man must pay good money, red and white, for that which he desires with his heart and reaches out his hand to possess himself of.

Just then the street door resounded with the clang of impetuous knocking. His cousin Will went down, and presently Wat heard the noise of opening bars, and then the sough of rude, soldier-like speech filled the stairway.

"Wat Gordon! Wat Gordon!" cried a voice which sounded familiar enough to him, "come down forthwith! Here! I have brought you a letter from your love."

And Wat swore a vow beneath his breath to stop the mouth of the rascal who knew no better than to shout a message so false and inopportune in the ears of the girl of the dusky eyelashes. Nevertheless, he went quickly to the landing and looked down.

A burly figure stood blocking the stairway beneath, and a ruddy face gleamed upwards like a moon out of a mist, as Maisie held the lamp aloft. A voice, somewhat husky with too recent good living, cried, "Lochinvar, here is a letter to you from the Colonel. Great good may it do you, but may the last drop in the cogie of him that sent it be the sourest, for

raising Davie Dunbar from the good company and the jolly pint-stoup, to be splattered at this time of night with the dirty suds of every greasy frow in all Amersfort!"

And the stout soldier dusted certain befouling drops from his military coat with a very indignant expression.

"Not that the company was over choice or the wine fit to be called aught but poison. 'Mony littles mak' a mickle,' says the old Scots saw. But, my certes, of such a brew as yon it micht be said 'mony mickles make but little!' For an it were not for the filling up of your belly, ten pints of their Amersfort twopenny ale is no more kenned on a man than so much dish-washings!"

"Come your ways in and sit down, sergeant," said Mistress Maisie, hospitably. For her hand was somewhat weary with holding the lamp aloft, while Sergeant Davie Dunbar described the entertainment he had just left. Meanwhile Wat had opened his scrap of grey official letter, and appeared to stand fixed in thought upon the words which he found written therein.

"What may be the import of your message, since you are grown suddenly so solemn-jawed over it, Wat?" cried Davie Dunbar, going up to look over his shoulder, while Maisie and Kate McGhie stood talking quietly apart.

"I am bidden go on a quest into the wild country by the seashore, a mission that in itself I should like well enough, were it not that it comes to me by the hand of Black Murdo of Barra."

Davie Dunbar whistled thoughtfully.

"When the corbie is from home, it 's like to be an ill day for wee lame lammies!" he said sententiously.

Wat Gordon cocked his guardsman's cap at the words. He had set it on his head as he went downstairs.

"I am Walter Gordon, of Lochinvar, and though that be for the nonce but a barren heritage, I am also a gentleman-private in the Prince's Scots Dragoons, and I count not the Earl of Barra more than a buzzard kite."

"I see well that ye are but a wee innocent lammie after all," retorted Sergeant Dunbar, "little ye ken about the regimen of war, if at the outset of a campaign ye begin by belittling your enemy. I tell you Murdo of Barra has more brains under his Highland bonnet than all your gay Douglas dragoons, from your swearing colonel to the suckling drummer-boy —who no sooner leaves his mother's breast than he learns to mouth curses and lisp strange oaths."

Wat Gordon shook his head with a certain unconvinced and dour determination.

"I have been in wild places and my sword has brought me through, but though I own that, I like not this commission—yet feared of Barra I am not."

And he handed Davie Dunbar the paper. The sergeant read it aloud :—

"Walter Gordon, some time of Lochinvar, of the Prince's Scottish Dragoon Guards, you are ordered to obtain the true numeration of each regiment in the camp and city of Amersfort—their officering, the numbers of each company, and of those that cannot be passed by the muster officers, the tally of those sick with fever, and of those still recovering from it, the number of cannon on the works and where they are posted. These lists you are to transmit with your own hand, to an officer appointed to receive them by His Highness the Prince at the Inn of Brederode by the Northern Sand-dunes, who will furnish you with a receipt

for them. This receipt you will preserve and return to me in token that you have fulfilled your mission. The officers of the regiments and the commanders of batteries have hereby orders to render you a correct and instant accompt.

"(Signed) For the Stadtholder and the States-General,

"BARRA,
"*Provost-Marshal of the City and Camp.*"

William Gordon had come into the room while the sergeant was reading the paper, and now stood looking at Walter's unusual commission.

"There will be murder done when you come to our colonel," he said, "and ask him to tell you that the most part of his regiment is already in hospital, and also how many of the rest are sickening for it."

But Wat Gordon stood up and tightened his sword-belt, hitching his sword forward so that the hilt fell easily under his hand. Then he flipped the mandate carelessly upon the widened fingers of his left hand before sticking it through his belt.

"It is, at least, an order," he said grandly, "and so long as I am in the service of His Highness the Prince, my orders I will obey."

"And pray what else would you do, callant?" interjected Sergeant David Dunbar, "but obey your orders—so long, at least, as ye are sure that the lad that bids ye has the richt to bid ye!"

CHAPTER II

WHY KATE HATED LOCHINVAR

It was the evening of the following day before Wat Gordon was ready to start. It had taken him so long to obtain all the invaluable information as to the strength of the armies of the States-General and of their allies, which were collected at Amersfort in order to roll back the threatened invasion of the King of France. Twice during the day had he rushed into his cousin's lodging for a brief moment in order to snatch a morsel of food, but on neither occasion had he been able to catch so much as a glimpse of Kate. It was now the gloaming, and the night promised to fall clear and chill. A low mist was collecting here and there behind the clumps of bushes, and crawling low along the surface of the canals. But all above was clear, and the stars were beginning to come out in familiar patterns.

For the third and last time Wat made an errand up to his cousin's rooms, even after his escort had arrived, and once more Maisie took him gently by the hand, bidding him good-speed on his quest perilous. But even while his cousin's wife was speaking, the young man's eye continued to wander restlessly. He longed rather to listen to upbraiding from another voice, and, in place of Maisie's soft willing kiss, to carry away the farewell touch of a more scornful hand.

"Cousin," he said at last, reluctantly and a little

shyly, "I pray you say farewell for me to Mistress Kate, since she is not here to bid me farewell for herself. In what, think you, have I offended her?"

"Nay, Wat," answered the gentle Maisie, "concerning that you must e'en find means of judging for yourself on your return."

"But listen, Cousin Maisie, this venture that I go upon is a quest of life or death to me, and many are the chances that I may not return at all."

"I will even go speak with my gossip Kate, and see whether she will come to bid you good prospering on your adventure and a safe return from it."

And so saying Maisie passed from the room as silently as a white swan swims athwart the mere. In a little while she returned with Kate, who, beside her budding matronhood, seemed but a young lissom slip of willow-wand.

"Here, Kate," said Maisie, as she entered holding her friend by the hand, "is our Cousin Wat, come in on us to bid farewell. He goes a far road and on a heavy adventure. He would say good-bye to the friends who are with him in this strange land before he departs, and of these you are one, are you not, my Kate?"

As soon as Mistress Maisie loosened her hand the girl went directly to the window-seat, where she stood leaning gracefully with her cheek laid softly against the shutter. She turned a little and shivered at her friend's pointed appeal.

"If Walter Gordon says it, it must be so," she answered, with certain quiet bitterness.

Lochinvar was deeply stung by her words. He came somewhat nearer to her, clasping his hands nervously before him, his face set and pale as it had never been in the presence of an enemy.

"Kate," he said, "I ask you again, wherein have I so grievously offended you, that, on your coming to this land of exile, you should treat me like a dog—yes, worse than a wandering cur-dog. It is true that once long ago I was foolish—to blame, blackly and bitterly in the wrong, if you will. But now all humbly I ask you to forgive me ere I go, it may be to my death."

The girl looked at him with a strange light in her eyes—scorn, pity, and self-will struggling together for the mastery.

At last in a hard dry voice she said, "There is nothing to forgive. If there had been I should have forgiven you. As it is, I have only forgotten."

Maisie had left the room and there was deep silence in it and about, save for the distant crying of the staid Dutch children late at their plays on the canal sides of Amersfort, and the clatter of the home-returning wooden shoon on the pavemented streets. The young man drew himself up till his height towered above the girl like a watch-tower over a city wall. His eyes rested steadfastly on her the while. She had a feeling that a desperate kind of love was in the air, and that for aught she knew he might be about to clasp her fiercely in his arms. And it had, perhaps, been well for both if he had, for at that moment she raised her eyes and her heart wavered within her. He looked so tall and strong. She was sure that her head would come no higher upon his breast than the blue ribbon of his cavalry shoulder-knot. She wondered if his arms would prove as strong as they looked, if she suddenly were to find herself folded safe within them.

"Kate," he said wistfully, coming nearer to her.

Now Wat Gordon ought not to have spoken. The

single word in the silence of the room brought the girl back to herself. Instinctively she put out her hand, as though to ward off something threatening or overpowering. The gulf yawned instantly between them, and the full flood-tide of Wat Gordon's opportunity ebbed away as rapidly as it had flowed.

Yet when a moment later the girl lifted her long, dark lashes and revealed her eyes shining shyly glorious beneath them, Wat Gordon gazed into their depths till his breath came quick and short through his nostrils, and a peal of bells seemed to jangle all out of tune in his heart. He stood like some shy woodland beast new taken in a trap.

"Well?" she said inquiringly, yet somewhat more softly than she had yet spoken.

Wat clenched his fist. In that single syllable the girl seemed to lay all the burden of blame, proof, explanation of the past upon him alone, and the hopeless magnitude of the task cut him to the quick.

"Kate!" he cried, "I will not again ask you to forgive me; but, if I do not come back, at least believe that I died more worthily than perhaps I have lived—though neither have I ever lived so as to shame you, even had you seen me at my worst. And, ere I go, give me at least a love-token that I may carry it with me till I die."

Kate's lips parted as though she had somewhat to answer if she would, but she kept a faintly smiling silence instead, and only looked casually about the room. A single worn glove lay on the top of a little cabinet of dark oak. She lifted it and handed it to Wat. The young man eagerly seized the glove, pressed it with quick passion to his lips, and then thrust it deep into the bosom of his military coat. He would have taken the hand which gave him the

gift, but a certain malicious innocence in the girl's next words suddenly dammed his gratitude at the fountain-head.

"I have nothing of my own to give," she said, "for I have just newly come off the sea. But this glove of Maisie's will mayhap serve as well. Besides which, I heard her say yestreen that she had some time ago lost its marrow in the market-place of Amersfort."

With a fierce hand Wat Gordon tore the glove from his bosom and threw it impulsively out of the window into the canal. Then he squared his shoulders and turned him about in order to stride haughtily and indignantly from the room.

But even as he went he saw a quaintly subtle amusement shining in the girl's eyes—laughter made lovely by the possibility of indignant tears behind it, and on her perfectest lips that quick petulant pout, which had seemed so adorable to him in the old days when he had laid so many ingenious snares to bring it out. Wat was intensely piqued—more piqued perhaps than angry. He who had wooed great ladies, and on whom in the ante-chambers of kings kind damsels all too beautiful had smiled till princes waxed jealous, was now made a mock of by a slim she-slip compact of mischievous devices. He looked again and yet more keenly at the girl by the window. Certainly it was so. Mischief lurked quaintly but unmistakably under the demure, upward curl of those eyelashes. A kind of still, calm fury took him, a set desperation like that of battle.

"I will take my own love-token," he cried, striding suddenly over to her.

And so, almost but not quite, ere Kate was aware, he had stooped and kissed her.

Then, in an instant, as soon indeed as he had

realised his deed, all his courage went from him. His triumph of a moment became at once flat despair, and he stood before her ashamed, abject as a dog that is caught in a fault and trembles for the lash.

Without a word the girl pointed to the door. And such was the force of her white anger and scorn upon him that Wat Gordon, who was about to ride carelessly to face death as he had often done before, slunk through it cowering and speechless.

Maisie was coming along the little boarded passage as he passed out.

"Farewell, cousin," she said to him. "Will you not bid me good-bye again ere you go, if only for the old sake's sake?"

But Wat Gordon went past her as though he had not heard, trampling stupidly down the narrow stairs like a bullock in the market-place, the spring all gone out of his foot, the upstanding airy defiance fallen away from his carriage.

Then in a moment more there came up from the street front the sound of trampling horses and the ring of accoutrement, as three or four riders set spurs to their horses and rode clattering over the cobbles towards the city gates.

Maisie went quickly into the sitting-room to her friend.

"What have you been doing to my Wat?" she asked, grasping her tightly by the arm. "Have you quarrelled with him?"

Kate was standing behind the shutter, looking down the street along which the four riders were rapidly vanishing. At the corner where they turned one of the horses shied and reared, bringing down its iron-shod hoofs sharply on the pavement with a little

jet of sparks, and almost throwing its rider. Instinctively the girl uttered a little cry, and set her hand against her side.

"What said Wat to you, dearest Kate," asked Maisie again, altering the form of her question, "that you sent him thus speechless and dumfoundered away? He passed me at the stair-head as if he knew me not."

Finding Kate still absorbed and silent, Maisie sat down in her own chair, and waited. Presently, with a long sigh, the girl sank on her knees beside her, and, taking her friend's hand, set it on her head. With sympathetic and well-accustomed fingers Maisie as was her custom softly smoothed and caressed the dark tangle of curls. She did not utter a word till she heard a quick sob catch at the bottom of Kate's throat. Then she spoke very low, leaning forward till she could lay her cheek against the girl's brow.

"What said he? Tell me, dearest, if you can; tell your gossip Maisie," she whispered.

It was a voice that not many could resist when it pleaded thus—most like a dove cooing to its mate in the early summer mornings.

There fell a silence for a while in the little upper room; but Maisie the wise one did not again speak. She only waited.

"Oh, I hate him!" at last said Kate McGhie, lifting her head with centred intensity of expression.

Maisie smiled a little, indulgently, leaning back so that her friend's dark eyes should not notice it. She smiled as one who is in the things of love at least a thousand years older, and who in her day has seen and tasted bread sweet and bread bitter.

"And certainly you do well to hate him, my Kate," this cunning Mistress Maisie said, very gently,

her hand continuing to run softly through the meshes of Kate's curls; "nevertheless, for all that you are glad that he kissed you."

The girl lifted her head as quickly from its resting-place as though a needle had pricked her unawares. She eyed her friend with a grave, shocked surprise.

"You were listening!" she said.

And the censure in her tone might have been that of a General Assembly of the Kirk, so full of weighty rebuke was it.

"No, Kate," said her friend quietly. "I was in the kitchen all the time, putting the bone in the broth for William's supper. I heard no single word of your talk. But, Kate, my lassie, I am not so very ignorant concerning these things which you stand on the brink of. Come, what had you been saying to him to provoke him to kiss you?"

"He but asked me for a love-token to take with him to the wars—which I gave him, and how could I tell?" said the girl, a little plaintively. Things had not gone as they ought, and now her own familiar friend was about to blame her for it.

Maisie waited a moment discreetly, hoping that Kate would go on; but she appeared to consider that she had said enough. She only pillowed her head lower on her gossip's knee, and submitted contentedly to the loving hand which caressed her ringlets.

"And you gave him the love-token?" queried her friend quietly.

"I told him that I had nothing of my own to give him, because my baggage had not yet arrived; and it chanced that I saw one of your old marrowless gloves lying there on the cabinet—so I gave him that. I thought," she added plaintively, after a pause, "that it would do just as well."

At which conclusion Maisie laughed helplessly, rocking to and fro; then she checked herself, and began again. Kate raised her head, and looked at her in new surprise.

"You are the strangest girl!" at last Maisie said. "You have sundry passages with a gallant youth. You smile not unkindly upon him. You quarrel and are separated. After years you meet in a distant land. He asks you for a gage to carry with him to the wars, a badge fragrant of his lady and his love, and you give him—an odd glove of his cousin's wife's! Truly an idea most quaint and meritorious!"

"And Maisie," said Kate solemnly, looking up at her with her head still on her hands, "would you believe it?—He stamped his foot and threw the glove out of the window there into the canal! He ought not to have done that, ought he?"

"My Kate," said her friend, "do not forget that I am no longer a girl, but a woman wedded——"

"Six months," interrupted Kate McGhie, a little mischievously.

"And when I see the brave lass with whom, in another and a dearer land, I came through so many perils, in danger of letting foolish anger wrong both herself and another, you will forgive me if I have a word to say. I speak because I have come in peace to the goal of my own loving. Wat loves you. I am sure of that. Can you not tell me what it is that you have against him? No great matter, surely; for, though reckless and headstrong beyond most, the lad is yet honest, up-standing, true."

Kate McGhie was silent for a while, only leaning her head a little harder against the caressing hand.

Then, with her face bent down, she spoke softly:

"In Scotland he loved *me* not, but only the making

of love. If so be that Wat Gordon will love me here in the Lowlands of Holland, he must do it like one that loves for death or life; not like a gay gallant that makes love to every maid in town, all for dalliance in a garden pleasaunce on a summer's day."

The girl drew herself up nearer to her friend's face. Maisie Lennox on her part quietly leaned over and laid her cheek against Kate's. It was damp where a cherry-great tear had rolled down it. Maisie understood, but said nothing. She only pressed her gossip a little closer and waited. In a while Kate's arms went gently round about her neck, and her face drew yet a little nearer to the listening ear.

"Once," she whispered, "I feared that I was in danger of loving him first and most—and that he but played with me. I feared it much," she went on, with a little return of the low sob, which caused her friend's arms to clasp themselves more tightly about her, "I feared that I might learn to love him too soon. So that is the reason—why—*I hate him now!*"

CHAPTER III

THE BULL, THE CALF, AND THE KILLER

WAT LOCHINVAR rode out of the city of Amersfort with anger humming fierce in his heart, the Black Horseman riding pickaback behind him. He paid little attention to the three cut-throat-looking knaves who had been provided as his escort, till the outer port of the city gates had closed behind him and the chill airs of the outlands, unwarmed by friendly civic supper-fires, met him shrilly in the teeth.

He had been played with, tricked, betrayed, so he told himself. Never more would he think of her—the light trifler with men's hearts. She might gang her own wilful gait for him; but there was one thing he was well assured of—never more would Wat Gordon trust any woman born of woman, never speak a word of love to one of the fickle breed again. On this he was resolved like steel. For him, henceforth, only the stern elation of combat, the clatter of harness, the joy of the headlong charge—point to point, eye to eye, he would meet his man, when neither would be afraid of aught, save of yielding or craving a favour. From that day forth his sword should be his love, his regiment his married wife, his cause and King his family; while his faithful charger, nuzzling against his breast, would bestow on him the only passionate caresses he would ever know, until on some stricken field it was his fate to fill a soldier's grave.

Almost could Walter Gordon have wept in his saddle to think of his wrongs, and death seemed a sweet thing to him beside the fickle favours of any woman. He bethought him of his cousin Will with something of a pitying smile.

"Poor fool!" he said to himself; "he is married. He thinks himself happy. How much better had it been to live for glory!"

But even as he battered himself into a conviction of his own rooted indifference to the things of love, he began to wonder how long his present adventure would detain him. Could he be back in time on the morrow to hear the first trip of a light foot on the stairs in Zaandpoort Street, as *she* came from her sleeping-room, fresh as though God had made her all anew that morning?

For this is a quality of the wisdom of man, that thinking upon a maid ofttimes makes it vain—especially if the man be very brave or very wise, and the maid exceeding fair. Gradually, however, the changing clatter of the dozen hoofs behind Lochinvar forced itself upon his hearing, and he remembered that he was not alone.

He turned to his followers, and, curbing his horse a little, waited for them to come up. They ranged themselves two on one side of him and one on the other. Lochinvar eyed them with surprising disfavour.

"You are surely the last scourings of the camp," he said brusquely, for it was too little his habit to beat about the bush; "what may you have been doing with yourselves? You could not all three have been made so unhallowedly ugly as that. After all, God is a good God, and kind to the evil and to the good."

The fellow on Lochinvar's left was a great red-faced man with an immense scar, where (as it appeared) one side of his face had been cut away wellnigh to the cheek-bone—a wound which had healed unevenly in ridges and weals, and now remained of a deep plum colour.

"What is your name?" said Lochinvar to this man.

"I am called Haxo the Bull," he answered, "and I am of the retinue of my Lord of Barra."

"And how came you by your English?" asked Lochinvar.

"My mother always declared that my father was of that nation," answered the man readily enough.

"To conclude," continued Wat, who was impatient of further conference with such rank knaves, "what might be your distinguished rank in the service of my Lord of Barra?"

"I am his camp butcher," said the man, laying his hand on a long, keen knife which swung at his belt on the opposite side from his sword.

"And these other two gentlemen, your honourable companions?" queried Wat, indicating them over his shoulder with contemptuous thumb.

The hulking fellow of the scar made a gesture with his shoulders, which said as plain as might be, "They are of age; ask themselves."

But the nearer of the two did not wait to be asked. He was a hairless, flaccid-faced rogue of a pasty grey complexion, and even uglier than the plum-coloured Bull, with a certain intact and virgin hideousness of his own.

"I, for my part, am called Haxo's Calf, and I am not ashamed of the name!" he said.

And, thinking this an excellent jest, he showed a row of teeth like those of a hungry dog when he

snatches a bone from a comrade not his equal in the fray.

"And, I doubt not, a fit calf of such a sire," quoth Lochinvar, looking from one to the other.

"He is my apprentice, not my son—praise to the Virgin and all the saints!" said Haxo, looking at the Calf quite as scornfully as Wat himself.

Lochinvar now transferred his attention to the third. He wore a small round cap on the top of his head, and his narrow and meagre forehead ran back shining and polished, to the nape of his neck. His lack-lustre eyes were set curiously at different angles in his head. He had thin lips, which parted nervously over black, gaping teeth, and his nose was broken as if with a blow of a hammer.

"And is this gentleman also of Monsieur Haxo's gallant company, and in the suite of his Excellency my Lord of Barra?"

Haxo nodded his head with some appreciation of Wat's penetration.

"He is, indeed," he said; "he is my chief slaughterman, and a prince at his business."

"He is called 'The Killer,'" interjected the Calf, smacking his lips with unction. "It is a good name for him."

Wat Gordon urged his horse onward with great and undisguised disgust. To be sent on a dangerous mission with three such arrant rascals, told him the value that his employers set upon his life. And if he had chanced at that moment to turn him about in his saddle, the evil smile of triumph which passed simultaneously over the faces of his companions might have told him still more.

The small cavalcade of four went clattering on through the dusky coolness of night, across many

small wooden bridges and over multitudinous canals. It passed through villages, in which the inhabitants were already snoring behind their green blinds the unanimous antiphonal bass of the rustic just—though, as yet, it was little past nine of the clock on the great kirk tower of Amersfort, and in the city streets and in the camp every one was at the height of merriment and enjoyment.

Wafts of balmy country scents blew across the by-ways along which they went; and through the limpid grey coolness where the young leaves of the sparse hedgerow trees brushed his face, Wat could see that he was passing countless squares of parti-coloured bloom. Miles of hyacinth, crocus, and narcissus gardens stretched away on either hand beyond the low, carefully cut Dutch hedges. Haxo the Bull rode first, showing them the way to the inn of Brederode silently, save that every now and then he would cry a word over his shoulder, either to one of his ill-favoured retinue or to an unseen watcher at some lonely cross-road.

Wat followed sullenly and fiercely, without caring much about the direction in which he was being taken. His mind, however, was preternaturally busy, going carefully over all the points of his interview with Kate, and very soon from the heights of justified indignation he fell to accusing himself of rude stupidity.

"I fear she will never look kindly on me again," he said aloud. "This time I have certainly offended her for ever."

And the thought troubled him more than all the traitorous Barras and ill-conditioned Bull Haxos in the world.

A breath of perfume blew fresh across the way

from a field of dark purple bloom, and with an overpowering rush there came back to him the sweet scent of Kate's hair as for a moment he had bent over her by the window. He let the reins fall on his horse's neck, and almost cried aloud in agony at the thought of losing so great a treasure.

"And shall I never see her more," he said, "never watch the responsive blood spring redly to her cheek, never see the anger flash proudly in her eye, never (were it but for once) touch the sweet tangle of her hair?"

Wat's love-lorn melancholy might have driven him to further and yet wilder utterance had he not been conscious of a slight metallic click behind him, which certainly did not come from the hoofs of the horses. He turned sharply at the sound and caught Haxo's Calf with a pistol in his right hand, and the Killer with his long butcher's knife bare and uplifted. Haxo himself was riding unconcernedly on in front. Wat quickened the pace of his horse, and rode alongside the Bull.

"Sir Butcher," he said calmly, "do your men behind there wish to have their weapons ready in case of meeting the enemy, or do they perchance desire to flesh them in my back? It may seem a trifling matter to trouble you with, and of no great consequence, nevertheless I should somewhat like to ascertain their intentions."

Haxo glanced behind him. The Calf and the Killer were closing in upon Wat.

"Varlets," cried Haxo in a terrible voice, "put your weapons in your belts, ride wide apart and far behind, or I will send you both quick to hell!"

The men fell asunder at the words, and for a mile or two only the sound of the horses' feet pounding

the hard paven road came to Wat's ears. But he did not again return to that entrancing dream of Kate, her beauty, and her hard-heartedness which had so nearly led to his destruction. Yet, nevertheless, whatever he said or did, he remained through all that followed conscious of his love for her, and for the remainder of the night the desire of getting back to Amersfort in order to see her sharpened every faculty, and kept every sense on the alert.

More than once during the night Haxo endeavoured to enter into conversation, but Wat, indignant at the cowardly attempt on his life (for so he was bound to consider it), waved him peremptorily aside.

"Do your duty without further words," he said; "lead on directly to the inn of Brederode."

It was long past the gloaming, and already wearing nigh to the watershed of the night, before the perfectly flat country of marsh and polder through which they had been riding gave place to a district in which the undulations of the surface were distinctly felt beneath the horses' feet. Here, also, the hard-baked, dusty roads gave place to softer and more loosely knit tracks of sand, on which the ironshod hoofs made no sound. They were, in fact, fast approaching that broad belt of dunes which shuts off the rich, flower-covered nurseries of Haarlem from the barren, heathy wastes along the borders of the Northern Sea.

On their right they passed the dark walls of the castle of Brederode, and pursued their way to the very edge of the lofty dunes, which at this point are every year encroaching upon the cultivated fields. Presently they came to a long, low, white building surrounded by dark hedges, which in the coolness of the night sent out a pleasant odour of young beech

leaves. The court-yard was silent, the windows black. Not a ray of light was visible anywhere.

Walter Gordon rode directly up to the door. He felt with his hand that it stood open to the wall, and that a dark passage yawned before him. Instinctively he drew back a little way to decide what he should do. With an unknown house before him and a cut-throat crew behind, he judged that he would be wiser to proceed with extreme caution.

"Keep wide from me at your peril," he cried threateningly to his rascal company. The three horses backed simultaneously, and Haxo, his Calf, and his Killer waited in an irregular semicircle, while Wat took out of his pocket a tinder-box and from his holster a candle. There was not a breath of air, and when Lochinvar lighted the taper the flame mounted steadily upwards, so that he had no need even to shelter it with his hand while the flame went down and then as slowly came again, as all candles do when they are first lighted.

Wat glanced up at the sign of the Black Bull's Head, which was set in rude caricature over the door of the inn. His mind wandered grimly to the significance of that emblem in his own country, and to the many good men and true who had dined with the Black Bull's head on the table—and thereafter dined no more in this world. And to think that he, Wat Gordon of Lochinvar, had brought the Bull with him, together with the Bull-calf and the Killer to keep him company to the Black Bull of Brederode! He took the conceit as an omen, and gritted his teeth to remember what an arrant gull he had been.

"I shall never see my love more," he said under his breath; "well, never mind, Wat Gordon, lad—if die you must, there are some now alive who will be

in a similar plight ere you turn up your toes. And at all events I am glad that I kissed her."

He dismounted and drew his sword.

"Stand still where you are," he cried to Haxo. "Advance an inch at your peril till I give the word."

He looped his horse's rein to the iron hook at the cheek of the inn door. Then he gripped his sword tighter, and said a prayer which ended somewhat unorthodoxly:

"I wish I had that glove which I threw into the canal. For after all she gave it to me. Also, her lips pout most adorably when she is angered."

And this seemed strange enough information to give the Deity. But without doubt its sincerity carried it further heavenwards than many an empty Credo. For the God who made love does not, like Jove, laugh at lovers' vows.

CHAPTER IV

THE DUEL AT THE INN OF BREDERODE

So, thinking with all his might upon the adorable pout of his lady's lips, that right loyal lover Walter Gordon strode, not without fear, but all the braver for mastering it, into the dark passage which stretched straight before him, gloomy as a sea cave at midnight. Doors still blacker yawned on either side of him like the mouths of huge cannon. He held his candle aloft, and paused a moment at each, striving with all his might to penetrate the silence that reigned within. But the faint circle of illumination hardly passed beyond the threshold. Wat, as he held his breath and listened, only heard the rats scuttle and the mice cheep in the oaken wainscoting.

It was with a feeling of chill water running icily down his back that he passed each black cavern, glancing warily over his shoulder lest he should catch the downward stroke of an arm in the doorway, or see the candle-light flash on the deadly blade of the Killer's butchering knife.

It was nerve-shaking work. The sweat, chill as the clammy mist of the night, began to pour down Wat's face, and his flesh grew prickly all over as though he had been stuck full of pins.

Unless something happened, he felt that in another moment he must shriek aloud. He stopped

and listened. Somewhere near him he felt sure he could distinguish the sound of breathing. It was not the heavy, regular to-and-fro respiration of unconscious sleep, but rather the quicker and shorter breathing of one who has recently undergone severe exertion, and whose heart still runs fast ahead.

Wat stood and listened. The sound came from half way up the stairs, out of a room with a door which opened wider than the others, and which now stood, gaping black and ominous, directly before him. Wat could hear the sound of feet behind him, cautiously shuffling on the flags of the doorway, and by this sign he knew that his three ruffians were there waiting for him with the weapons of their trade naked and deadly in their hands. He was trapped, taken between the brutal, dastard butchers behind him, and the unknown but more terrible breathers in the dark above him.

Yet his very desperation brought a compensating calmness. He pressed his arm against his side, where, in an inner pocket, he carried the papers he had come to deliver. He undid the button of his cloak, and let it fall to the ground to clear his sword-arm. Then, bending forward like a runner straining to obtain good pace at the start of a short race, he went up the stairs steadily and warily till he had reached the door of the room. His candle was almost blown out with the quickness of his motion. It flickered low, and then caught again, as Wat stepped nimbly within, and made the point of his sword circle about him to clear himself a space against attack.

Then he looked around him. He found himself in a wide, low-ceilinged room, with many small windows along the side. A curtain of arras hung at one

end, and a table stood in front of it—a hall of rustic assembly, as it seemed. At the far side of the table from him and between its edge and the curtain, calm as though it had been broad day, sat a tall, thin man. He had red hair and a short red beard, both liberally sprinkled with grey. His eyes were of a curious China blue, pale and cold. He was clad in a French uniform, and a pair of pistols and a drawn sword lay on the table before him.

The man sat perfectly still, with his elbows on the table and his chin on the knuckles of the hands, which were joined beneath his beard. His eyes were alive, however, and surveyed Wat Gordon from head to foot. The effect of this scrutiny upon the man in the chair was somewhat surprising.

He started half way to his feet, and so disturbed the table behind which he sat, that one of the pistols rolled off and fell underneath, so that the butt appeared on the side nearest to Wat. At the noise the arras behind was disturbed, and Lochinvar felt that unseen eyes were watching and unseen ears listening behind its shelter.

Wat on his side was not less astonished. For at the first glance he knew the man at the table.

"Jack—Jack Scarlett?" he stammered, half holding out and half withholding his hand, as to a friend met unexpectedly in more than doubtful circumstances. The man nodded without appearing to notice the outstretched hand, and continued to look the young man over with the pale, piercing eyes of blue.

"Then you are the officer of the Prince appointed to receive my despatches?" cried Wat, when words came back to him.

The man whom Wat had called Jack Scarlett shook his head.

"With another I might pretend it," he said. "But not with you, Lord of Lochinvar. Now do I see that Barra plots deeper and yet more simply than I had given his Highland brains credit for. I little knew that the cavalier whom I was to meet to-night was Wat Gordon, mine ancient scholar and good ally."

"It pleases you to speak riddles with your tongue, John," replied Walter, "you that were wont to strike so strong and straight with the blade of steel. You that know me well, mine old master of the fence, I beseech to speak plainly and riddle to me no more."

Scarlett never took his blue eyes off Lochinvar's face as he spoke.

"We are here, my Lord of Lochinvar, in the matter of a most serious conference," he said; "therefore, do not stand there fixed and forwandered in the midst of the floor. Set your candle on a sconce and be seated."

Wat shook his head.

"There are too many perils behind me and before," he replied; "I must have light and room to guard my head ere I can sit or talk with you or any man, seeing that my life is not my own so long as my commission remains unfulfilled."

Scarlett knocked three times loudly on the board in front of him.

In a moment the arras stirred behind, and a man-at-arms appeared. He was clad in a pale blue uniform, unlike any that Wat had seen in the army of the States-General.

"Bring lights," said Scarlett to him in French.

In a few minutes the room was fully illumined by the rays of half a dozen candles set in a pair of silver candlesticks, each of them holding three lights.

Then Scarlett pointed Wat to a chair.

"Surely you will do me the honour to be seated now," he said courteously.

Wat replied by picking up a cross-legged stool of black oak, and setting it down at the angle of the room, at the point most distant from the arras, and also from the door by which he had entered. Then he sat down upon it, still holding his sword bare in his right hand, and made the point of it play with the toe of his buff leathern riding-boot, while he waited impatiently for Scarlett to speak.

The man at the table had never once removed his eyes from Lochinvar's face. Then in a quiet, steady, unhurried voice he began to speak:

"You have not forgotten, my Lord of Lochinvar——"

At the repetition of the title Walter stirred his shoulders a little disdainfully.

"I say again my Lord of Lochinvar has not forgotten—my lord has every right to the title. It was given to his ancestors by the grandfather of his present Majesty——"

"His present Majesty?" said Walter, looking up inquiringly.

"Aye," replied Scarlett, with some apparent heat, "his most gracious Majesty James the Second, King of Great Britain and Ireland. Since when did Walter Gordon of Lochinvar need to stand considering who has the right to be styled his lawful King?"

And the keen, cold eyes glinted like steel blades in the candle-light.

"It was in fencing and not in loyalty that I took lessons from you, John Scarlett," replied Lochinvar haughtily, looking with level brows at the red-bearded man across the table, who still leaned his chin on

the tips of his fingers. "I pray you, say out your message and be done."

"But this is my message," Scarlett went on, "which I was commanded to deliver to the man whom I should meet here in the Inn of Brederode. You are the servant of King James, and his messages and commands are yours to obey."

Wat Gordon bowed stiffly. "In so far," he said, "as they do not conflict with my orders from my superior officers in the service of the Prince of Orange, in whose army I am at present a humble soldier."

"You are indeed a soldier in the Scottish Guards, which were raised in that country by permission of King James, and by him lent to his son-in-law, the Stadtholder of Holland. But surely the commands of your King are before all; before the mandates of Parliament, before the commands of generals—aye, before even the love of wife and children."

And the sonorous words brought a fire into the cold eyes of the speaker and an answering erectness into the pose of Wat Gordon, who had hitherto been listening listlessly but watchfully, as he continued to tap the point of his riding-boot with his sword-blade.

"I have yet to hear what are the commands of His Majesty the King," said Wat, lifting his hat at the name.

Scarlett tossed a sealed paper across the table, and as Wat rose to take it, he kept a wary eye on the two chief points of danger—the division in the arras and the door, behind which, as he well knew, were stationed these three worthy gentry of my Lord Barra's retinue, Haxo the Bull, the Calf, and the Killer.

Wat took the paper with his left hand, broke the

seal, and unfolded it by shaking it open with a quick clacking jerk. It read thus :—

JAMES II., by the GRACE OF GOD, etc.

It is my command that John Scarlett, Lieutenant of the Luxemburg Regiment in the service of the King of France, obtain the papers relating to the numbers and dispositions of the troops of the States-General in the city and camp of Amersfort, which I have reason to believe to be in the possession of my trusty servant and loving Cousin, Walter Gordon, Lord of Lochinvar in Galloway.

At Whitehall, this 14 *of Aprile,* 1688—.

JAMES R.

Walter bent his knee, kissed the King's message, and, rising to his feet, as courteously folded it and handed it back to Lieutenant Scarlett.

"I am the King's subject, it is true," he said. "Moreover, the King is anointed, and his word binds those to whom it is addressed. But I am also the soldier of the Prince of Orange and of the States-General of Holland. I eat their bread ; I wear their uniform ; I take their pay ; to them I have sworn the oath of allegiance. I am in this Inn of Brederode as a plain soldier, charged with orders given to me by my superior officer, and I cannot depart from these orders while I live a free man and able to carry them out."

"But the King—the King——?" sternly reiterated Scarlett, rising for the first time to his feet, and clapping the palm of his hand sharply on the table by way of emphasis.

"The King," replied Walter, in a voice deeply moved, "is indeed my King. But he has no right to

command a soldier to become a traitor, nor to turn an honest man into a spy. He may command my life and my fortunes. He may command my death. But, landless, friendless, and an exile though I be, mine honour at least is mine own. I refuse to deliver the papers with which I have been intrusted, or to be a traitor to the colours under which I serve."

While Walter spoke Scarlett stood impatiently tapping the table with the paper, which he had refolded.

"The request at any rate is nothing more than a formality," he said, "you are here alone. Your three attendant rascals are, equally with myself, in the pay of the King of France. They wait under arms at that door——"

"Under butchers' knives, say rather!" interrupted Lochinvar, scornfully.

But Scarlett paid no heed to his words.

"If you will deliver up the papers cheerfully, according to the mandate of your King, I have in my pocket a patent of nobility made out for the man who should put them into my hand at the Inn of Brederode—besides the promise of pardons and restoration of heritages for all his friends and associates at present lying outside the law in Scotland and elsewhere. Think well, for much more than the present hangs upon your answer. Life and death for many others are in it!"

Wat stood still without making any answer. With his left hand he turned the dainty lace upon the cuff of his coat-sleeve carefully back. He thought vaguely of his love whom he was renouncing to go to certain death, of the friends whose pardon he was refusing. Most clearly of all he bethought him of the old tower in the midst of the Loch of Lochinvar under the

But he desired greatly to die an honourable death, with his face to a worthy enemy ; for John Scarlett had been in his time the greatest swordsman in Europe, and though Walter was by far his ablest pupil in Scotland, yet at no time could he have stood any chance in open field against his master.

So, as the swords felt one another after the salute, Wat set his teeth and wondered how long it would last, and how much Kate would ever know. There is little need to describe the fight at length. From the first Scarlett contented himself with keeping his opponent's blade in play, feeling it, humouring it, and, as it were, coaxing it into position. And for some bouts Wat fought without any of that verve and lightning versatility of fence which were his usual characteristics in action. Something seemed to paralyse his powers and weigh down his sword-blade, as though the quick and living steel had turned to lead in his hand. It might be that the feeling of ancient pupilage had returned to him, for to himself he seemed rather to be taking a lesson in the finesse of defence than to be fighting against terrible odds for his life and honour.

But suddenly a wonderful change came over him. A laugh was heard out in the passage, in which stood Haxo the Bull and his satellites—a laugh thin, acrid, unmistakable. It stung Wat to the roots of his heart. For a moment he was in difficulty. The problem divided his mind even between thrust and parry. There was no man whom he knew well whose laugh rang like that. But even as he fought he remembered how once, in the palace of the Stadtholder, he had seen the Prince come in leaning upon the arm of a young, dark-haired man, whose meagre, hatchet face was decorated, for all ornament, with a

black moustache so scanty that it seemed twisted of twenty hairs, and whose ends hung down, one on either side of his lips, like a couple of rats' tails. This, and a certain bitter rasping laugh to which he had at once taken a dislike, were all Wat remembered of that young man. But after the distinguished party had passed in to supper, he learned that the Prince's companion and confidant was one of his own nation, Murdo McAlister, Lord of Barra and the Small Isles, and that he was one to whom the Prince of Orange looked for counsel in all that did not touch the ecclesiastical position of affairs of Scotland.

The laugh which rang out from the dark passage behind the Bull, the Calf, and the Killer, was the same which he had heard at the supper-party of the Stadtholder.

From that moment Wat knew that in no event had he now any chance for his life. It mattered little whether or not he killed John Scarlett. Barra would certainly have the papers. For he knew the man well enough to know that, having taken such trouble to obtain the return of the numbers and positions for his own traitorous purposes, he would never let the bearer of them slip through his fingers. No oaths of his own or another's would serve to bind Murdo of the Isles in that which concerned his schemes. Yet even in that moment of agony Wat could not help wondering why Barra had taken so difficult and round-about a way of obtaining and transmitting a paper, which it would have been perfectly easy for him to have gained by means of his official position, and to have forwarded to the King of France by more ordinary channels. But however this may be, certain it is that the laugh irritated Wat Gordon strangely, and at the first sound of it he sprang towards

Scarlett with an energy and fierceness entirely unlike the lassitude with which he had previously fought.

From that moment he forced the fighting, attacking with furious vigour and astonishing rapidity, so that the great master-at-arms soon found that even he had enough to do simply to stand it out on the defensive. Yet Scarlett smiled, too, for he thought that this bout of youthful fury would soon wear itself down, and that then he would easily enough get in his favourite deadly thrust in quart, to which no answer had ever yet been discovered.

But Walter never gave him time; for again the acrid laugh came from the dark passage and set all the young man's blood tingling to put a sword deep in the traitor's throat, and then, if need be, die with his foot on his enemy's breast. He sped two thrusts one after the other so swiftly that Scarlett, countering over late for the first, had to leap back in order to measure his distance for the second. In so doing his foot slipped, and his blade, caught unexpectedly by Lochinvar's, went ringing against the ceiling and fell on the floor. Walter's point was at his breast the next moment.

"Yield!" said Walter; "I hold you to your word. You are at my mercy."

"I yield," said Scarlett. "It was well done. Never before in any land was I thus vanquished in a fair fight."

CHAPTER V

HAXO THE BULL INTERFERES

WALTER bowed and returned him his sword, holding it by the blade.

"And now, Lieutenant Scarlett," he said, "I desire to ride back to Amersfort, and you, I doubt not, wish as eagerly to return whence you came—by sea to Flanders, as I guess. I shall be grateful, therefore, if you will draw off your company, and give an order that my horse be brought to that door which is in possession of your own men."

At this moment Haxo the Bull stepped into the room.

"Not so fast by a great deal, master fighter with windlestraws," he cried; "if it have pleased this friend of yours and traitorous officer of the King of France to make a public bargain upon the issue of a private duel, that has nothing to do with me. There are many other fights to be fought ere you leave this house with the papers safe in your pocket. Listen," he continued, addressing the officers and soldiers standing in the opposite doorway behind Lieutenant Scarlett, "are you to lose your reward and be left without reason or remedy here in the very heart of an enemy's country—your work undone, your doom sealed? For if ye let him escape, this fellow will instantly set the Prince's horsemen or his swift Dutch ships upon your track. Better to kill him and take

his papers without delay, when rewards and promotions will assuredly be yours on your return to your Master."

It was easy to see that this harangue had not been the inspiration of Haxo himself, for he delivered it, now trippingly and now haltingly, like a schoolboy who does not know the meaning of his lesson. But yet it was perfectly comprehensible to all in the room, and Wat could see that the purport of it moved the officers and men greatly. The wide archway behind the table from which the arras had been drawn back was now thronged with faces.

Wat Gordon stood aside whistling an air softly, like one who waits for a discussion to be concluded in which he has no interest. He had not so much as looked at Haxo the Bull while he was speaking.

But John Scarlett grew redder and redder as he listened, and so soon as the butcher was finished he started towards him so abruptly and fiercely, that that worthy gat himself incontinently behind the weapons of his allies, the Calf and the Killer, with an alacrity which seemed quite disproportionate to his physical condition.

"I am the commander here," Scarlett cried, "and I am bound by my promise. I am determined to let this man go according to my word. Stand back there!"

But the elder of the two French officers came forward. He saluted Scarlett and addressed himself directly to him.

"Lieutenant Scarlett," he said, "I am your equal in rank though not in standing. We were sent here under your orders to obtain certain despatches of great importance to our general and to the coming campaign. We shall therefore be compelled to take

this man with us, with all the papers in his possession, and to report your conduct to the commander at headquarters."

His words appeared first to amuse and then to infuriate John Scarlett.

Striking suddenly at the triple candlestick on his right he leaped over the table, crying, "Down with the lights! I am with you, Wat Gordon. Through the door and have at them out into the open. It is your only chance."

Wat, whose sword was ready in his hand, struck sideways at the other group of lights and sent them crashing to the floor. Most of these went out at once in their fall, but one or two continued to burn for a moment with a faint light as they lay among the trampling feet. Wat threw himself at the doorway in which he had heard the laugh, and through which Scarlett had preceded him a moment before. Wat could hear that valiant sworder somewhere in front of him, striking good blows and swearing, "Out with you, devil's brats!" at the top of his voice. So when he reached the end of the passage, he found at the outer door Scarlett making brisk play with four or five men, who were endeavouring to hem him into a narrow space, where he should not have the liberty of his sword-arm.

Wat ranged himself beside his late enemy, the two long blades began to flicker fatally in the starlight, and the hurt men to cry out and stagger away. Then quite unexpectedly the crowd in front broke and fled.

"Get on your horse, Wat!" Scarlett cried. "I can keep the door against these loons of mine—at least till you are well out of the way."

There were two good horses one on either side of

the doorway—Wat's, and that upon which Haxo had ridden. Wat sprang upon his own, and, with a cut of his sword, Scarlett divided the halter. The horse wheeled, and set off at a gallop through the sandhills. Yet he went reluctantly, for had it not been for the safety of his papers, Wat would gladly have stayed and helped John Scarlett to engage the whole of the army of France, with any number of Bulls and Killers in addition thereto.

For, as he vanished into the black night, he could hear John Scarlett advising the first man who desired three feet of cold steel through his vitals to step up and be accommodated. And as he turned eastward towards Amersfort, riding beneath the silent bulk of the old castle of Brederode, he heard again the clash of iron and the cry of pain which he knew so well. He smiled a little grimly, and wished nothing better than that his papers had been delivered, and he again at work at his old master's elbow.

Presently, however, having, as it seemed to him, left all possibility of pursuit behind, Wat put his horse into an easier pace, and rode on by silent and unfrequented paths towards the east, judging his direction by the stars—which had been an old study of his when it was his hap to take to the heather in the black days of the Covenant in Scotland.

As he went he became aware of the noise of a horse galloping swiftly behind him. He drew his sword and stood on his defence, lest the sound should betoken a new danger; but presently he heard a voice calling his own name loudly:

"Wat Gordon! I say, Wat Gordon!"

It was the voice of Jack Scarlett, his late enemy and present deliverer.

He rode up beside Walter, very strange to look

upon, clad in some suit of white or pale blanket-colour that glimmered in the dusk of the night.

"I gave half a dozen of the rascals that which it will be two days or they get the better of, I'se warrant," he said, chuckling to himself; "and then, thinking that mayhap I might not be welcome any longer in the army of France, I e'en came my ways after you. As I rode I cast my uniform and left my commission in the pocket of my coat. So I am but poor masterless Jack Scarlett once more—a free comrade looking for a regiment, and equipped with nothing but his thews and his long sword, which, God be thanked, are both his own. Think ye the States-General and the Yellow Prince have need of such as I?"

"And how now about the anointed King?" Wat could not help saying.

"The anointed King is safe in Whitehall, and can afford to wait till Jack Scarlett is a little less hungry," answered the freelance frankly.

Having been thus fortunate in obtaining the only two good horses about the inn of Brederode (for the Frenchmen had come by sea to the little port of Lis-op-Zee, and the horses of the Calf and the Killer were but sorry jades), Scarlett had ridden all the way back without a challenge, or so much as encountering any sound more threatening than the roopy chuckle of disturbed poultry on the farmhouse roosts as he clattered by on his way.

As the two horsemen came nearer to the city, and the east began to send up a fountain of rosy hues to mingle with the grey spaces of the early morning, Wat could not help laughing at the figure his comrade presented. The master-at-arms was attired simply and Spartanly in such darned and patched underclothing as he had amassed during half a dozen

campaigns. These were not all of the same material nor colour. They were not indeed at all points strictly continuous, the native hide being allowed to show itself through here and there, while only the long sword belted about the waist and the cavalry boots remained to tell of the well-seasoned man of wars and stratagems.

Jack Scarlett was noways offended at Wat's frank laughter. He even glanced down at himself with a comically rueful air.

"I wish to the saints that I had met somebody else in this garb," he said; "and then I own I could have laughed myself off my horse."

But nevertheless laugh he did, and that most heartily, like a good-humoured carle, at the figure of sin he cut in the morning light; and specially he was delighted at the paralysed astonishment of a lank, hobbledehoy gooseherd who came trolloping along a path towards a canal bridge, yawning so that his lower jaw and his head well-nigh dropped apart. For at sight of the red-bearded man in the white sacking and top-boots the wand-twirling yokel gave a yell sudden as the popping of a cork, and forthwith fled, running fleet-foot along the edge of the canal as though the devil himself had been tattering at his tail.

"This guiser's mode will never do to enter the city of Amersfort withal!" quoth Scarlett, looking down at his own inconsequent ragamuffin swathings.

And he paused to consider the problem, while Wat divided himself between chuckling at his late enemy's dilemma, thinking what he would say in his coming interview with Barra in the camp, and (what occupied nine out of every ten minutes) wondering how Kate McGhie would receive him in the Street of Zaandpoort.

At last the man in the white bandagings had an idea. He clapped his hand suddenly to his brow.

"What a dull dotard am I to forget Sandy Lyall!"

"I know," he continued, in explanation, "a certain honest fool of a Scot that hath wedded a wife of the country. He lives but a mile from here and breeds young Flamands for the Prince's armies, and ducks for the Amersfort market. We will e'en go find him, and make him deliver of the best in his wardrobe. For he and I count kin in some seventeenth or eighteenth degree, though this is the first time I ever bethought me of claiming it."

And with no more words John Scarlett turned his horse briskly down a side lane, just as the sun was rising and beginning to shine ruddily brown through the morning haze. The sails of a score of windmills darted up suddenly black in the level rush of light, and every hissing goose and waddling, matronly hen had a rosy side and a grey side, together with an attenuated shadow which stretched up the dykes and away across the polders.

Presently Scarlett and his companion, at the foot of a leafy by-lane, came to the house of the Scot who had married the Flemish wife for the very practical purposes described by Scarlett.

The madcap figure in white went forward to the door, while Wat remained behind cackling helplessly with idiot laughter. Scarlett thundered on the warped and sun-whitened deal of the panels with the hilt of his sword. Then, receiving no response, he kicked lustily with his boots and swore roundly at the unseen occupants in a dozen camp dialects.

During his harangues, sulky maledictions grumbled intermittently from the house. Presently an upper window flew open, a splash of dirty water fell souse

on the warrior, and still more sadly bedraggled the preposterous Quixotry of his attire.

The temper of the master-at-arms was now strained to the breaking point. "Sandy Lyall," he cried—and to do him justice his voice was more full of sorrow than of anger—"Sandy Lyall, of Pittenweem, listen to me, John Scarlett, gin ye dinna come doon this minute and get me a suit o' claes, warm and dry, I 'll thraw your dirty Fifish neck—aye, like a twist of rotten straw at a rick-thatching."

But even this explicit malediction threatened to go by without effect.

But at long and last there looked out of the small diamond-paned window from which the jar of water had fallen, the head of a respectable enough woman, who wore a red shawl wrapped round her coarse black hair in the fashion of a nightcap.

"Decent woman," cried Jack Scarlett to her, "is your man at hame?"

But the woman, feather-bed sleep yet blinking heavily in her eyes, threw up her hands and shrieked aloud at the unexpected apparition of a man thus mountebanking before her window in white and incomplete skin-tights.

Without articulate speech she withdrew her head and fled within. Whereat Scarlett fell to louder knocking than before, exclaiming all the while on the idleness, incapacity, and general uselessness of such men of Fife as had married foreigneering sluts, and especially threatening what he would do to the particular body and soul of Sandy Lyall, sometime indweller in the ancient borough of Pittenweem.

"Never did I see such a man. The ill-faured wife o' him settin' her head out o' a winnock-sole at five in the morning, and Sandy himsel' lyin' snorkin' an'

wamblin' in his naked bed like a gussy swine in a stye! Lord, Lord, wait till I get my hands on him! I'll learn him to keep honester men than himsel' waitin' on the loan of his Sabbath gear, crawling partan o' the East Neuk that he is!"

"Aye, John Scarlett, man, but is that you, na?" drawled a quiet, sleepy voice at the window. "Wha wad hae thocht on seeing you in mountebank's cleading so early in the morning? Hae ye been at some play-actin' near by? ye dinna look as if you had gotten muckle for your pains. Come awa ben, and I'll gar the wife rise an' get ye porridge—siclike porridge as ane can get in this Guid-forsaken country, that is mair like hen-meat than decent brose for Scots thrapples, to my thinkin'!"

"Sandy Lyall!" cried Scarlett, still much incensed, "hear to me! Come down this instant and let me in! Gi'e me a pair o' trews, a coat, and a decent cloak, and let me be gaun, for I am on an errand of great importance which takes me before the Prince of Orange himsel' this very morning, and it befits not a Scot and a soldier to appear before his High Mightiness in this costume."

"I'll come doon the noo, as fast as I can don my gear and truss my points!" cried Sandy Lyall. "Ye were aye a rude man and unceevil a' the days o' ye, John Scarlett. But I canna leave ony Scots lad to want for a pair o' breeks and a cloak to cover his nakedness—or what amounts to the same thing, as the monkey said when he sat doon on the hot girdle and gat up again before he was fairly rested."

And with these words, Sandy Lyall of Pittenweem in the shire of Fife, slowly descended, his feet sounding portentously on the wooden ladder. The door

opened, and there was the master of the dwelling standing with outstretched hand, bidding his compatriots welcome to his house. The action would have disarmed a Cossack of Russia. It quenched the anger of John Scarlett like magic.

"Aye, man, an' hoo 's a' wi' ye?" he said, as it is the custom for all Scots to say when they forgather with one another in any land under the sun.

After turning out of one drawer and another various articles of his wife's attire, which were clearly not intended (as Sandy remarked) "for breeks to a grown man like John Scarlett," the master of the house at last managed to array his friend somewhat less unsuitably in a coat of dark blue Rotterdam cloth, adorned with tails, which on his thinner figure clapped readily together in a military manner; a pair of breeches of tanned leather went very well with the boots and sword-belt of buff, which were all that remained to Scarlett of his fine French uniform. The master-at-arms surveyed himself with no small satisfaction.

"For a Fifer, ye are a man of some discernment," he said; "and your duds fit me no that ill. They maun hae been made for ye when ye were younger, and altogether a better-lookin' figure o' a man!"

"Aye; they were cutted oot for me when I was coortin'—no this ane," Sandy Lyall explained, indicating his present wife with a placid, contemptuous thumb, "but a braw, weel-tochered lass oot o' the pairish o' Sant Andros. But she wadna hae me because I cam' frae Pittenweem. She said I smelled o' fish-creels."

"And what, Master Lyall, might have brought you to Flanders?" asked Wat, who had been waiting

as patiently as he might while his companion arrayed himself.

He thought that this otiose burgher of Pittenweem must be a strange subject for the religious enthusiasm, which was mostly in these days the cause of a man's being exiled from his native country.

"Weel," returned Sandy, with immense and impressive gravity, checking off the details upon the palm of one hand with the index-finger of the other, "ye see the way o't was this: There was a lass, and there was a man, and there was me. And the man and me, we baith wanted the lass, ye comprehend? And the lass didna want but ane o' us. And that ane wasna me. So I gied the man a clour, and he fell to the grund and didna get up. And the lass she gaed and telled. So that was the way that I left my native land for conscience' sake."

Wat marvelled at the simple, quiet-looking man who had so strenuously arranged matters to his satisfaction before leaving his love and the land of his birth.

"Aye, but that wasna the warst o' it," Sandy Lyall went on, "for, a' owin' to that lang-tongued limmer, I had to leave ahint me as thrivin' a cooper's business as there was in a' the heartsome toon o' Pittenweem —aye, and as mony as half a score o' folk owin' me siller! But I owed ither folk a deal mair, and that was aye some consolation."

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CHAPTER VI

THE PRINCE OF ORANGE

In a long, low, narrow room in the palace of the Stadtholder in the city of Amersfort, sat Murdo, Lord of Barra and the Small Isles. The head of a great though isolated western clan, he had detached himself from the general sentiments of his people with regard to religion and loyalty. First his father and then he himself had taken the Covenanting side in the national struggle—his father through interest and conviction, the son from interest alone. Both, however, had carried with them the unquestioning loyalty of their clan, so that it became an important consideration to any claimant for the throne of Britain who desired quietness in the north, to have on his side the McAlisters, Lords of Barra and the Small Isles.

The Prince of Orange had given to both father and son a welcome and a place of refuge when the storm of persecution shook even the wild Highlands, and the Government were granting to their more zealous adherents letters of fire and sword for the extirpation of suspected clans, and especially for the encouragement of the well-affected by the plunder of rebels and psalm-singers.

Now, in acknowledgment of this timely succour and safe harbourage, Barra had, ever since his father's death, given his counsel to the Prince on many matters

concerning Scotland. Yet, though Murdo McAlister had been used, he had never been fully trusted by William of Orange, nor yet by those wise and far-seeing men who stood closest about him. Something crafty in Barra's look, something sinister in his eye, kept those who knew him best from placing complete confidence in him. And there were those who made no difficulty about declaring that Murdo of Barra had a foot in either camp, and that, were it not for the importance of the information sent from Holland to the court of James the Second, my Lord of Barra could very well return home, and enjoy his long barren moorlands and wave-fretted heritages in unvexed peace.

It was yet early morning when Wat and John Scarlett stood before my Lord of Barra in the palace room which he occupied as Provost-Marshal of the city and camp. They saluted him civilly, while his cold, viperish eye took in the details of their attire with a certain chill and insolent regard, which made Wat quiver from head to foot with desire to kill him.

To judge by the Provost-Marshal's reception, he might never have seen either of them before. Yet Lochinvar was as certain as that he lived that it was his laugh which had jarred upon him in the passage behind Haxo in the inn of Brederode, and which had been the means of bringing the combat to a close. Yet he, too, must have ridden fast and far since the fight at the inn, if Wat's vivid impression had any basis in fact.

"Your business with me?" inquired Barra haughtily, looking straight past them into the blank wall behind.

"You know my business," said Walter abruptly. "I carried out your orders in collecting information

with regard to the number of the troops, the position of the regiments, and the defences of the camp and city. This report I was ordered to deliver to an officer of the Prince privately—in order, as I was informed, not to offend those dignitaries of the city and others who hated the war and wished ill-success to the Prince's campaigns. I set out, therefore, last evening with three of your retainers, supplied for the purpose by you, to the inn of Brederode. There I was met, not by an accredited servant of the Prince, but by an officer of the French King, who endeavoured first by promises and then by force to obtain the papers from me; and now I have brought back the reports safely to Amersfort, to lay them before the Prince in person, and, at the same time, to tax you with double-dealing and treachery."

Barra listened with an amused air.

"And pray, whom do you expect to delude with this cock-and-bull story?" he said. "Not, surely, the Prince, in whose company I was till a late hour last night; and not surely myself, who never in my life either issued or heard of any such preposterous order."

"I demand to see the Prince, to whom I shall speak my mind," reiterated Walter, still more curtly.

"You shall see the inside of a prison in a few moments," returned Barra, with vicious emphasis. But ere he could summon an officer, the inner door opened, and there entered a dark, thin, sallow-faced man, with brilliant, hollow-set eyes, who walked with his head a little forward, as if he had gone all his life in haste.

It was the Prince of Orange himself, dressed in his general's uniform, but without decorations or orders of any kind.

Barra rose at his entrance and remained standing.

"Pray sit down," said the Prince to him, "and proceed with your conversation with these gentlemen of your country."

"I was about," said Barra deferentially, "to commit to prison this soldier of the Douglas Dragoon regiment for a most insolent slander concerning myself, and also for collecting information as to the condition of our forces with intent to communicate it to the enemy. There is, indeed, an officer of the King of France with the man at this very moment, but in disguise."

The Prince turned his bright keen eyes upon Wat and Scarlett in turn.

"And you, sir! what have you to say?" he asked quietly.

Whereupon, nothing daunted, Wat told his plain tale, and showed the order which he had received from Sergeant Davie Dunbar, signed with Barra's name.

"I never wrote the order, and never heard of it," said Barra, who stood, calmly contemptuous, at the Prince's elbow.

"Call Sergeant David Dunbar!" ordered the Prince.

It was a few minutes before that staunch soldier arrived. In the meantime, the Prince turned his attention to Scarlett.

"You are an officer of the King of France?" he said, with an ominous gleam in his eye as he spoke of his arch-enemy.

"I had that honour," replied Scarlett, "till early this morning, when it was my fortune to help this ancient friend of mine out of a difficulty into which I had led him. Moreover, being a gentleman, I could

not remain in such a service nor serve with subordinates who knew not the sacredness of a soldier's pledge. I am therefore once more a free man, and my sword is at the disposal of any honourable prince who will accept of it."

"You were a celebrated master-of-arms in Scotland, were you not?" asked the Prince.

"If your Highness is good enough to say so," said Scarlett, bowing. "And also in France, the first in estimation in the army of the Prince of Condé."

"And you understand the drilling and mustering of raw levies?" asked the Prince of Orange, with some eagerness in his tone.

"There are a dozen regiments in the French service at this moment who are exceedingly well aware of that, your Highness," replied John Scarlett, with a somewhat peculiar smile.

"Come to me this day week at the camp," said the Prince abruptly, after remaining a moment in deep thought.

"Sergeant David Dunbar!" announced an officer of the Prince's retinue.

And in a moment that sturdy Scot stood before the Stadtholder, exceedingly flustered by his sudden summons, and cudgelling his brains to think why he should be sent for so early in the day by his general.

"You took an order the night before last to this gentleman's quarters?" said the Prince. "From whom did you receive that order, and what speed did you make with your mission?"

"I received the letter from one whom I knew as a servant of my Lord of Barra—one Haxo, a butcher in the camp. 'Make haste,' he bade me, 'this is from my lord to the Scot who dwells in the Street of Zaandpoort, the dragoon called Walter Gordon of

Lochinvar, serving in Douglas' regiment.' So I went there willingly enough, and eke with speed, the more by token that I knew Wat Gordon and his cousin well, as also Will Gordon's wife, who is a wise, sober-like lass of Galloway, and can cook most excellent suppers."

"That will serve, sergeant," said William of Orange. "There is some mistake or double-dealing here which I shall doubtless discover in good time. Come to me both together at the camp this day week at the hour of noon, and I will have further conference with you in my tent. You are at liberty to join your regiment, and take your friend with you."

Thereupon Walter went to the Prince, and, bending on his knee, presented him with the despatches which, in the inn of Brederode, he had guarded with his life.

The Prince took them without a word of thanks or commendation, and thrust them into the breast of his coat as carelessly as though they had been so much waste paper.

For the soldier-prince, who had never known fear in his life, took courage in others as a matter of course.

And so my Lord Barra was left alone in the office of the Provost-Marshal, looking blackly across his table after Wat and Scarlett as they followed the Prince from the room.

CHAPTER VII

MISTRESS MAISIE LENNOX, DIPLOMATIST

WHEN they reached the outer air, Wat drew a long breath. He was still alive and still a soldier of the States-General, and now at last he had a whole week's time to think uninterruptedly of Kate. But first of all he must see her. He was for starting off in the direction of Zaandpoort Street, but the thoughts of his companion were thirsty thoughts.

"I declare," he cried, "my throat is parched like an Edinburgh ash-backet on these accursed roads. Let us go to a change-house and slake our thrapples with a draught of Hollands and water. 'Tis the poor best that the country affords."

But Wat had other things than Hollands in his mind—the distracting ripple of Kate's hair, and the way she had of holding the fingers of one hand on her side when she stood for a moment pensive.

He searched in his belt for a silver thaler, and gave it to Scarlett.

"Go drink, and meet me at the camp to-morrow," he said. Then he strode away towards the street of Zaandpoort, leaving his companion alternately looking at the broad unclipped silver piece in his hand, and staring after him in astonishment.

"The young fool is either mad or in love," confided Scarlett, to the world at large; "but he has not

forgotten how to draw a good blade—so he cannot be so very deeply in love as yet!"

Wat started out boldly and bravely enough, but so soon as he reached the lilac-bushes which were planted at the foot of the dam of Zaandpoort, he began to feel his shyness returning trebly upon him. He had not been afraid during the night when he stood surrounded by assassins and enemies. Joyously and lightheartedly he had crossed swords with the greatest master-of-arms in Europe. But now, when he was at the foot of a little wooden stairway, the thought of a simple slim-figured girl at the top of it, caused the hot blood to tingle in his cheek, and little helpless pulses to throb and sting in his palms. Gladly would he have turned and fled. His hands had grown suddenly great and dirty. His military coat appeared so frayed and draggled with the night dews and the accidents of the way, that he dared not venture in such a guise into the presence of the lady of his dreams.

But it chanced that Will Gordon, his cousin, had been shaving at a small mirror which he had set against a twisted chimney-stack on the roof, both because it was a fine morning and because in the lodging in the street of Zaandpoort the chambers were small.

"Welcome back, Wat," he cried, craning his neck over the parapet, and wiping the soap from the razor upon the high stone coping; "went your night-ride to rights?"

"It went most mightily to wrongs," cried Wat, as cheerfully.

"Nevertheless, in spite of it you are here, safe and sound. Come up, man, therefore, and tell us the tale. My little lass will doubtless have something fragrant for breakfast in a moment."

Whereupon he cried lustily down to Maisie his wife, who was at the pan in the kitchen: "Put on a full platterful more. Here is our adventurer returned with a torn coat, a piteous tale, and a right hungry stomach!"

There was clearly no escape now, so Wat with his heart in his boots, strode as manfully as he could up the stair which he had been wont to climb but a day or two before with such complete and careless lack of thought.

When he opened the outer door, a cheerful smell of morning cookery took him gratefully by the nostrils, for the long ride and brisk adventure had quickened his appetite.

"Hither, cousin mine!" cried a light and pleasant voice from the kitchen.

"And welcome home again!" Maisie added, as he appeared in the doorway.

She had both her hands busy with eggs and flour about the cooking pan.

"I cannot shake hands with you, Wat," she said, "but to spite William I will give you a nice kiss."

And she came straight to him where he stood balancing himself uncertainly just within the threshold. Wat hesitated for the smallest part of a second.

"Do it quickly, or the eggs will be spoiled," she said, standing on tiptoe with her floury hands behind her.

"A kiss is worse spoiled by haste than ever an egg can be," said Wat, as with the kindly pressure of her lips his words and his confidence began to come back to him.

At his first entering in he had seen Kate stand at the other side of the fire from Maisie, but now he

looked in vain for her. Yet she had not left the room. Only at the first word of kissing she had entrenched herself behind a great oaken settle and on the farther side of a wide Dutch table, where, with her head bent upon an earthenware bowl, she began to prepare a salad with the most absolute attention and studious care.

Having kissed Maisie most dutifully, Wat went forward to offer his hand to Kate. She gave hers to him quickly, and yet as it seemed to him, reluctantly also. Instinctively she kept a chair between them as she did so.

"See, it is all over with oil and chopped lettuce," she said, looking plaintively at her hand, as though Wat had been personally responsible for the defilement.

Maisie was at the farther end of the room, bending over her saucepans. Wat leaned quickly across the table to Kate.

"Are you glad I have come back?" he asked in a low voice.

"You had a fine morning for your ride," she replied, looking down at the salad and mixing the ingredients with the most scrupulous exactitude.

Wat straightened himself instantaneously as if on parade, and stalked with much dignity to the end of the room at which Maisie was still busy.

And this caused him to miss a singular look which Kate cast after him, a look of mingled pity and entreaty, wholly wasted on the square shoulders and erect head, but from which, had Wat caught it, he might have learned that though it may sometimes be well to appear proud with a girl, nevertheless, if you love her, not too soon and not too often.

Presently Will Gordon came bustling down to

breakfast, having cleaned his accoutrements and adorned himself with such sober trappings as were permitted by the Spartan taste of the Covenanting regiment. Will had still that noisily cheerful self-consciousness which always characterises the very young husband doing the unaccustomed honours of his house.

"Sit down and be welcome, Wat, lad," he cried, "and tell us all the tale of your journeying."

And so at the table which Maisie had covered with plain coarse Dutch linen, very unlike the fine cloths which she had left behind her in Scotland, the four sat down. It was a heartsome meal, and after a little while Lochinvar began to tell his tale, giving himself little honour, making nothing of the danger, and dwelling much on the ridiculous aspect of Haxo the Bull, his ill-favoured Calf, and his bald-headed Killer.

As the tale proceeded Will kept up a constant fire of interjections such as "That was well thought on!" "Bravely! my lad!" and "Well done, Glenkens!" But presently Maisie left her seat, and came round to sit beside Wat as he began to tell of entering alone at midnight into the dark house of Brederode with the unknown danger before and the three traitors behind. All the time Kate sat still, saying nothing and eating nothing, her lips a little open and tremulous, and her dark eyes shining with a light in them like a sunbeam in the still water of a sea cave.

And when it came to the telling of the combat, and the little chance of life that he had, it so fared that Wat raised his eyes to Kate's, and lo! tears were running silently down her face and falling unregarded on her white gown.

In a moment more she had risen and left the table, slipping like a gleam of light into the next room.

Maisie looked up with much astonishment as she caught the waft of the girl's gown.

"Why, Kate!" she exclaimed, and without another word sped after her. When she reached the little room where Kate slept, she found the girl standing by the window, leaning her head against the thin curtain. She kept her back to her friend, and did not turn round at her entrance. Maisie carefully closed the door, and went up quickly to Kate. Silently she put her arm about the slim and supple waist.

"I—am not crying—I am not indeed!" said Kate, a little indignantly, putting her hand on her friend's wrist as if to push it away.

"No—no, of course you are not," said Maisie, making (to say the least of it) an affirmation, the truth of which was not wholly obvious. For the girl's tears dropped steadily upon her white gown, a great one even falling warm upon Maisie's hand at her waist, while all her slender body was shaken with sobs.

"It was only ——" Kate began, and then stopped.

Maisie sighed as she sat down on the white bed, which, as was its occupant's custom, had been made up with military precision quite an hour before. She drew Kate down beside her gently, till the girl's head rested on her shoulder.

"There, there, my lamb," she whispered soothingly, when at last Kate found what most she wanted—a soft and comfortably sympathetic surface to cry upon. Maisie's hand passed lightly over the shapely head with its straying and enticing thatch of dark love-locks, and her voice crooned and cooed over her friend like a dove over its mate in the nest. Then for a long time she continued to hush the girl in her arms, as if she had been but a little ailing child,

Once there came the sound of a foot heavily masculine in the passage, and a hand was laid on the latch. Kate made a motion to rise and dry her face, but Maisie's arms held her tight.

"Go away, William! Go away at once!" she cried with instant change of tone, her voice ringing out in such imperious fashion that Will Gordon, her husband, fled back to the sitting-room, feeling that he had just saved himself on the brink of some absolutely fatal mistake.

Yet all the while Maisie offered her friend not a word of sympathy, only the comforting of silent understanding, the touch of loving lips and hands, and the pressure of loving arms. Kate (she said to herself) would tell her what she wished at her own time. Maisie had a woman's tact, and did not press for an explanation of a girl's wayward moods, as even the wisest of men would have done on such an occasion.

"Oh, he might have been killed," at last Kate's words came in a rushing whisper, as she lifted her face a little higher on Maisie's shoulder. "And I had sent him away so cruelly. And when he came back I never told him that I was glad to see him, Maisie. I snatched away my hand." She added the last words as if that indefensible action had only crowned a long series of enormities.

"Well," answered her friend, smiling very lovingly down at her, "he is not gone yet. Come back and say it now. I daresay he will forgive you, if you look at him like that."

But Kate only sadly shook her head, a little reproachfully that such a revolutionary proposal should come from one of Maisie's pretended sympathy and understanding.

"How can I go back?" she said, hopelessly. They *saw* me crying, and they would sit and look at me all the time—like—like ——" (and Kate paused while she searched the universe for a comparison to express the most utter and abject stupidity) "well, just like men."

Yet she sighed and turned her face a little more inward towards Maisie's shoulder. "No, decidedly," she said, as if after all she had been considering the question; "I cannot go back."

Maisie loosened her arms from about Kate's neck. "Then you shall not, sweeting," she said with determination, as if a coercive army had been at hand; "lie you still there and I will get them away. Trust me, they shall know no more than it is good for men to know."

And she nodded her head to express the limited capacity of mankind, and the absolute necessity that there was for the wiser portion of the race to maintain them in a condition of strictly defined and diplomatic ignorance.

Before she went out of the bedroom Maisie set by the girl's side a small bottle of the sweet-scented water of Cologne, one which Wat himself had brought back from his last campaign. "He carried that nearly a year in his haversack," Maisie said, irrelevantly, as she set the vial within reach of Kate's hand. "I will go send him to take a bath. He must have ridden both hard and fast to be back from Brederode by six o'clock in the morning."

"You will not tell them," whispered the girl, faintly, catching at Maisie's hand as she went out, "nor let him think that I am—foolish?"

"Trust to me," said Maisie Lennox, nodding her head and smiling serenely back as she went out.

In the sitting-chamber she found the two young men still at the table talking together. They stopped with badly-assumed masculine ease as she entered. Since Will's rebuff at the chamber door they had sat conversing in perfunctory and uncomfortable sentences, their ears directed toward the door like those of a dog that hears an unkenned foot on the stair, their attention anywhere but upon the subject concerning which they were speaking.

Maisie began at once in the hushed and important tone of the messenger fresh from the seat of war. "Kate could not sleep last night for the noise of the wooden sabots upon the street outside. She has had a headache all this morning, and I ought not to have let her listen to Wat's tale of horrors——"

"I trust I did not——" Wat began, suddenly conscience-stricken.

"No, no," said Maisie, motioning him to sit down, "it was all my fault, not yours at all—I should have bethought me in time. She will be quite well after she has slept. Be sure you remember to walk quietly with your great boots," she added, looking viciously at her husband.

At this hint Wat rose to go. In doing so he accidentally pushed his stiff wooden chair back from the table with a loud creak, and then abjectly recoiled from Maisie's face of absolute horror.

He sat down again disconsolately. Will Gordon and he cast a pathetic look at each other. Their place was obviously not here. So one after the other they bent and pulled off their heavy foot-gear, while Maisie watched them with uplifted finger of the most solemnising caution. Then very softly the two men stole down the stairs carrying their boots in their hands.

Maisie listened till they were fairly out of the house. Then she went directly to Kate's door. She opened it and set her head within. There was an expression of almost heavenly peace and serenity upon her face. The consciousness of infinite well-doing dwelt upon it.

"It is all right!" she said, "they will never so much as guess why. They went out like lambs—carrying their boots under their arms!" And again Maisie nodded her head with smiling encouragement.

And yet diplomatists are usually selected from amongst men.

CHAPTER VIII

THE STREET OF THE BUTCHERY

It was still quite early one crisp morning when Kate McGhie set out to do her marketing. Ever since the first few days after her arrival in the city of Amersfort, she had been intrusted with this duty—both because she desired to do something to help her friend and gossip Maisie with her household cares, and also because, being a laird's daughter, she was more learned in the accomplishments of foreign tongues than the daughter of Anton Lennox of the Duchrae.

The sun shone on her face and touched lovingly the small straying curls of her hair, as Kate stood at the outer door of the lodgings in Zaandpoort Street. She was drawing on a pair of gloves which made a difficulty about the matter, and needed to be repeatedly coaxed with that adorable pout which Wat loved. She was clad from head to foot in doublet and pleated skirt of grey Scots cloth, woven both of them by that very worthy man and elder in the Kirk, William Edgar of Rhonehouse. She wore also a flat, broad bonnet; and the ribbon of the blue snood, which, in token of maidenhood, bound her hair, was tied in a dainty love-knot behind her ear.

The rebellious gloves were a pair of Spanish gauntlets of untanned leather, and she was calculating what she could buy for the silver florin, which

comprised all the united resources of the Zaandpoort establishment for the day. She allowed the slightest sigh to escape her of regret for the easier finances of Balmaghie, where neither her father nor she herself ever knew aught of the providing till the dishes were on the table, so completely did the ancient housekeeper of Roger McGhie keep the matter in her own responsible but exceedingly jealous hands.

"This experience of marketing will teach you many things you do not know," said Maisie, the newly-married wife, darkly. "It would indeed be a pretty pass if when you came to be married you did not know a leg of beef from a shoulder of mutton."

Yet, in spite of Maisie's words, there was no great chance, in the ordering of the domestic economy of Zaandpoort Street, of getting first-hand information upon the subject of such expensive and formidable dainties as these.

For the pay of a gentleman-private in the Covenanter's regiment did not allow of extravagances, even when it was supplemented by certain small sums brought safely over from Scotland by the hand and favour of more recent exiles.

But Kate McGhie had not come to live upon Will and Maisie as a dependant. She would be, she declared to her hostess, neither sorner nor idler; for she had brought with her certain moneys of her own, and her father in Scotland had promised to send her more at such times as he got the chance of a douce Scottish merchant coming to the Low Countries in search of Dutch tobacco and Flemish cloth.

It was, therefore, with the light, free step of one who is a partner in the concern that Kate took her way towards the market-place of Amersfort. She carried a small white wicker basket over her right

arm, and in her left hand she held the skirt of her kirtle as she went alertly stepping over the puddles and gutters in the streets, and even overleaping the backs of sundry slumbering dogs with a quick and dainty disdain which became her well. The soldier lads hurrying by with despatches turned their heads to watch her as she passed; and the brisk merchant 'prentices, going to their counting-houses at six in the morning (as was the custom of the time and place), risked their master's reprimand to stand a while and gaze as she tripped out of sight, careless in her maiden freedom alike of the gold braid of the officer and the broadcloth of the merchant.

At last Kate arrived in the wide square, into which looked down the hundred windows of the historical town-hall of Amersfort, one of the most famous in Netherlandish history. She at once penetrated fearlessly into that Babel of discord, and, disregarding the proffered attentions of the first noisy stall-keepers, she swept past them, and threaded her way steadily to the favoured and regular recipients of her custom, who by honest dealing and courtesy had already established their right to her confidence.

Pretty enough it was to see the practical intentness with which she examined the portions of meat and bundles of vegetables submitted to her judgment. How sagely and charmingly, and eke with what an air of wisdom did she not listen to these voluble explanations, one word in ten of which she might possibly understand. Then, holding up three or four slender white fingers, she would indicate the number of infinitesimal copper coins which she was willing to pay for the article.

Whereat the vendor would laugh, and reject the offer with a sadly resigned air, as much as to say that

doubtless such a noble young lady must needs have her jest with a poor man. And when, in her turn, Kate would smile sweetly and persistently, or even as a last resort pretend to go on to another stall, then presently and swiftly the bargain would be completed upon her own terms, and to the ample profit and satisfaction of the merchant.

Thus drawing all eyes upon her as she went by, trim and dainty from head to foot, graceful from the proud setting of her head on the swan-like neck to the turn of the slender ankle, this tall young Scots maid passed, light-foot, heart-whole, and fearless, through the discursive clamour of the market-place. Verily, a most pleasant sight for the eyes of men and women to behold.

And amongst others, my Lord of Barra watched her this day, not by any means for the first time. For though he had left his bed betimes and come down to the market-place of the city, ostensibly in order to observe the mood of the turbulent and often rebellious town—in reality he had left the palace solely for the purpose of watching for the slight form and swiftly gracious carriage which pertained to the latest arrival among the exiles from his own country. Nevertheless, he did not try to speak to her. Murdo of Barra had wisdom enough to wait till by chance or stratagem he could compass an effective entrance upon the stage of her life. On the very first day of her sojourn in Amersfort, he had taken the trouble to find out all that was known about her among the Scottish refugees. And without any great difficulty he had discovered a man from Galloway, who had informed him how that this maid was not only the sole heiress to the broad acres of Balmaghie, but also a true-blue daughter of the Covenants, and

one who had quarrelled with her father and all her kin for the sake of the banner of the Bible and Sword.

Barra shrugged his shoulders.

"For such a lip and such a waist, the King himself might venture to subscribe as many covenants as there are, and yet cry out for more!"

So it came to pass that, as often as Kate McGhie visited the morning bustle of the thronging market-place of Amersfort, so often there could be seen on the skirts of the crowd a tall, dark man in a close-fitting suit of black velvet, with ribbon bows of the new flat shape at the knees, and the orange-coloured hose and cloak of the Prince's household. He seemed mainly to be watching the delivering of the customs-dues by the incoming merchants, but also to be keeping a wary eye upon the chaffering crowd in the interests of law and order, as indeed became a Provost-Marshal.

But in spite of all, his eye never for a moment lost sight of the slim, graceful figure, nor of the grey cap and eagle's feather, which told of another country and a warmer blood than that which flowed so placidly in the veins of the honest burghers' wives who did their serenely contentious marketing at Kate McGhie's elbow.

It was nigh upon the stroke of seven when the girl emerged with heightened colour and quickened breath at the far end of the market-place. Her basket had grown heavy upon her rounds, and the long green purse was weighty now with copper coin, instead of holding a single knob of silver at one end.

Straight in front of Kate lay an alley which promised to conduct her by a nearer way to the shaded canal bank, from which diverged the street of Zaand-

poort, where already Maisie would be waiting for her return with the daily stores.

Kate struck fearlessly into the opening. It was a narrow and steep lane which led abruptly upwards from the market-place. The houses, with their beetle-browed, swallows'-nest balconies, almost met overhead, while the lower stories were taken up with crowded booths containing the humblest merchandise. Dirty children swarmed in the gutters. Fierce, battered, scowling faces of men looked out of sullen doorways, and scarred and disfigured women showed their heads fiercely or inquiringly at the rag-stuffed holes which served for windows.

At a curious elbow in this Street of the Butchery (as was its well-befitting name), Kate paused, startled a little at her strange surroundings. She looked anxiously about her. The girl had never been in this part of the town before, and she began to wish that she had taken her usual circuitous route homeward by the main streets and the canal bank.

But even while she looked uncertainly about, several fellows of the baser sort disengaged themselves from various low doorways and strolled towards her. Instantly Kate gripped the handle of her basket a little tighter, and keeping well in the middle of the street, endeavoured to pass the men by with great unconcern.

The first pair, who were indeed none other than our friends of the inn of Brederode, the Calf and the Killer, divided to let her pass. And Kate, having swept between them with her head high, found herself almost in the arms of Haxo the Bull, who held his hands wide to intercept her, laughing the while, as though she had been a poor beast that wished to escape from his shambles.

"Gently, my pretty one," he said, cocking his scarred and brutal head to the side to look at her, "'tis not so often that we have such dainty, high-stepping maids come to visit us here in the Street of the Butchery; and when they do, it is the custom of the country that they pay toll ere they depart."

And he would have laid a heavy hand on her shoulder; but Kate started back so quickly and fiercely that Haxo thought that she was about to draw a weapon upon him. With a well-executed feint she pretended to pass him on the right hand—then, light as a swallow, she made a dart past on his left, and lifting her kirtle wellnigh to her knee, she ran swiftly up the street. But from a dark alley in front two other men emerged and intercepted her, while from behind, Haxo and his myrmidons closed in upon her, running with all their might.

Seeing that it was impossible for her to escape by flight, Kate set down her basket at her feet and drew forth the keen little hunting-knife which she always wore in her garter. Then she set her back to the nearest wall, and resolved that it should go ill with the first who dared to lay a hand upon her.

"Fairly and softly, beauty," cried Haxo, insinuatingly, as he came up panting, "we mean you no harm, lady. But you must know that it is the custom of the Street of the Butchery that every stranger must pay toll to us. And for you the toll is of the sweetest, and will cost you naught but what you have plenty store of. I'faith! when did the tasting of such lips as yours do harm to any man?"

And Haxo's smile as he spoke became an entire infernal epic.

He drew cautiously closer, and as he brought his hideous, greasy face, stamped with all pollution,

nearer to hers, Kate drew back her hand ready to strike at him desperately with the knife. But as she did so, the snaky hand of the Killer grasped her wrist like a vice, while the Calf leaned over her shoulder and with his right hand took away the weapon. Kate was left completely at their mercy.

"Help! Help!" she shouted desperately, and the cry of pity and appeal rang vainly up and down the street. A few of the battered drabs of women leaned listlessly out of the windows, scarcely amused by the horseplay of Haxo and his companions. They saw so many much more terrible things every night and day in the Street of the Butchery.

CHAPTER IX

MY LORD OF BARRA

"HELP! Help! For God's sake, help!" again cried Kate. And the lamentable cry was at once a prayer to God and an appeal to man.

Very pitiful her voice sounded, and she thought, "Oh, if Wat Gordon were only here, I should not have been treated so!" Alas! it was the more unfortunate for both that Wat at that moment stood on guard at the city entrance of the camp of Amersfort.

But just as Haxo put his arm about her waist, a loud, clear voice higher up the street cried with authority, "Hold, rascals, what would you with the lady?"

"That is no business of yours!" instantly replied one of the men who had come up last.

Kate looked up hopefully. She saw at the corner of the street a tall, soldierly man clad in black velvet and wearing an orange cloak, evidently an officer of the Prince's household. He had his sword bare in his hand, and seeing her manifest distress he ran towards her eagerly, his shoulder-ribbons waving as he came.

The fellows about her shrank back and drew their short sailors' "whingers." But the gentleman instantly attacked them furiously with his long sword, for Haxo and his companions had fled at the first sound of Barra's voice, while the two who had

arrived later were engaging Kate's deliverer. Their short swords, however, were no match for the officer's cavalry blade. The weapon of one presently clattered upon the pavement, while his comrade ran off down an alley, holding his side as if he had been wounded.

Then, putting his left arm firmly about her, and holding his sword bare in the other, Kate's rescuer urged her to mount quickly up the street.

"They may return," he said; "they may bring others with them, my lady, in which case I might not be able to protect you, or even to serve you otherwise than by dying for you, which very gladly I would do."

Now Kate desired much to walk by herself, finding the arm about her waist discomposing, and having also the market-basket to carry; but it seemed at the time a thing impossible to say to a man who had just saved her life—or, at the least, had preserved her from the hands of many cruel ruffians.

In this manner they reached in safety the wider spaces of the upper streets, where Kate gladly saw the town's officers marching hither and thither with their halberts ported and their pistols in their belts.

Then she disengaged herself deftly from her protector's circling arm.

"I thank you, sir," she said, very gratefully, "for your so great and timely kindness to me. I shall never forget it; nor yet will my father, whose name is Roger McGhie of Balmaghie in the country of Scotland, ever forget your gentle courtesy to his daughter in the land of her exile."

The stranger doffed his bonnet and bowed low.

"I also am of your nation, fair mistress," said he. "In my own country I am called Murdo, Lord of Barra

and the Small Isles; but now it is mine honour alone that is great, for I also am an exile for truth's sake and must serve a foreign master, as you see."

And he touched with a certain noble humility his orange cloak and the Prince's badge and motto that were upon it.

Kate bowed in turn, and her eyes expressed a warmer interest than she had yet shown.

"My Lord of Barra," she said, "I have heard of you and of your distinguished services and position. I am the more grateful to one so noble for protecting a poor maid and an exile from insult."

"It is my privilege and my very great good fortune," said he, again lifting his hat with more than ordinary deference. "Let us walk together to your home; you lodge with your cousin of Earlstoun, do you not?"

"Yes; but how may my Lord Barra know of that?" said Kate in some bewilderment.

Her companion smiled complacently.

"Though I be but an exile, yet, by the Prince's special favour, I am set in charge of the good behaviour of this turbulent city, wherein it is my duty to know everything. This morning it chanced that I was on a tour of inspection in the worst and most dangerous parts, when it was my hap to be able to render you a very slight service."

Barra called a porter and bade him carry Kate's basket and walk behind them; but this that proud lass would not allow, whereupon the Provost-Marshal dismissed the man with a movement of his hand. And so in earnest talk the pair approached the entering in of the street of Zaandpoort.

It so happened that Wat Gordon, released from his duty in the camp, had hastened homewards as fast

as he could, hoping that he might be in time to help Kate with the preparation of the vegetables, and in especial with the salad; for it had become his utmost pleasure to do for her the most common and menial offices. As he arrived at the end of the street he saw Kate coming towards him, apparently lost in friendly intercourse with a tall officer of the Prince's household. He stood transfixed.

Presently she paused at the door and, looking across, she saw him.

"Wat!" she cried eagerly, "come hither!"

For she wished to tell him of her adventure.

But facing about and standing straight as an arrow, Walter Gordon (being an exceedingly foolish person) saluted the officer in the orange cloak and marched past as though he had not heard. Whereat Kate, mightily offended at his rudeness, asked my Lord of Barra to do her friend Mistress Maisie Gordon and herself the honour of entering their poor rooms.

"For it is not needful that those who are of the same country and cause should stand on punctilios."

So because of the pride of this stiff-necked Wat, my lord of Barra found footing in the street of Zaandpoort; for pride ofttimes breeds more and worse things than many sins called deadlier.

. . . . . .

Before Scarlett and Wat issued forth from the presence of the Prince on the day appointed for the interview, Wat had received a commission in his own regiment, while Scarlett was nominated instructor to the newly-formed companies of exiles, called first Buchan's and afterwards Egerton's Foot.

In addition to all this Wat had not forgotten to represent to the Prince the case of his cousin Will, and had reminded him of the great services he had

rendered the cause in Scotland; to which William of Orange had listened with seeming pleasure, but with regard to Will Gordon's promotion in the corps of the Covenant he had made no promises.

It was nevertheless with a proud and happy heart that Wat returned to his cousin's lodgings in the street of Zaandpoort. He had seen the Prince and found him well disposed. Even his enemy Barra had been able to do nothing against him, and if their feet were already climbing the lower rungs of the ladder of fortune, he felt that in some measure it was owing to his courage and address.

All that day Wat's heart kept time to a new and unwonted tune. The streets had never seemed so smiling, the faces of the children never so mirthful. The commonwealth of things was manifestly in excellent repair that afternoon in the city of Amersfort. Lochinvar hummed a jaunty marching stave as he strode towards the low door in Zaandpoort Street, while his heart beat fast to think that in a moment more he would be looking into those wondrous eyes whose kindness or cruelty had now become to him as life or death.

As he went a little softly up the stairs he heard above a noise of cheerful converse. An unknown man's voice spoke high and clear among the others. The lighter tones of women intermingled with it, pleasantly responsive. For a moment those within did not in the instancy of their discourse hear Wat's summons. At last Maisie opened the door, astonished that any one should knock at inner chamber-port, and as Wat entered he saw, sitting in his own accustomed place, his hat on the table, his sword unslung for ease, his enemy the Lord of Barra. The Provost-Marshal was talking easily and familiarly to

Kate, who sat on the low window-seat leaning a little forward, with interest written clearly on every line of her face. She was nursing her knee between her clasped palms with that quaint and subtle grace which had often gone to Wat's heart. Her dark eyes rested, not upon his incoming, of which she appeared to be for the moment unconscious, but upon the face of the speaker.

Wat and Barra submitted (it could not be called more) to Maisie's introduction—Wat with sullen blackness of countenance and the slightest inclination of his head, Barra with smiling patience, as though by the very irony of circumstances it had chanced to him to be introduced to his stable-boy.

Kate rose and took Wat's hand a moment in kindly fashion, though with eyes a little downcast, being not yet ready quite to forget his rudeness upon the street. But immediately she went back to her seat in order to listen to the conclusion of the story which Barra had been relating. It concerned the loyalty of the Highland clans to their chiefs, and as Barra told of their sacrifices, a genuine pleasure lightened in his dark face, his eyes glittered, and a new life breathed through his whole form. For pride in the loyalty of his clan was the selfish man's one enthusiasm.

Maisie sat down with her sewing close to where Wat stood moping and bending his brows, and noting his brow of constraint and gloom, she set herself lovingly to cheer him.

"We have had good news to-day," she said, smiling pleasantly at him, "news that William does not know yet. See!" she added, handing him a parchment from the table with heightened colour, for she had been married but six months, and her William was the pivot on which the universe revolved.

It was a commission as captain in the Covenant regiment in favour of William Gordon, called younger, of Earlstoun. Wat continued to look at it in amazement. It was what he had asked for from William of Orange that day without obtaining an answer.

"My Lord of Barra had it from the Prince's own hand. He says that the Stadtholder has long marked the address of my husband, and hath only delayed to reward it lest the short space he has been with the colours should arouse the jealousy of his comrades."

A spark of fury burnt up suddenly in Wat's eyes.

"Is the paper genuine, think you?" he asked, loudly enough for all to hear.

Maisie looked up quickly, astonished, not so much at his words as by the fierce, abrupt manner of his speech.

"Genuine!" she said in astonishment. "Why, my Lord Barra brought it himself. It is signed by his own hand and issued in the name of the Prince. Why do you ask if it be genuine?"

"I ask," cried Lochinvar, in the same fiercely offensive tone, "because the only document which I have ever seen bearing that signature and issued in the name of the Prince was a forgery, and as such was repudiated two days later by my Lord of Barra."

The words rang clearly and unmistakably through the room. Doubtless Barra heard them, and Kate also, for a deep flush of annoyance mounted slowly to her neck, touched with rose the ivory of her cheek, and faded out again, leaving her with more than her former paleness. But Barra never stopped a moment in the full, easy current of his narration. He continued to let fall his sentences with precisely the same cool, untroubled deliberation, fingering meanwhile the Prince's signet-ring, which he habitually

wore on his hand. Kate almost involuntarily moved a little nearer to him and fixed her eyes the more earnestly on his face, because she felt that Wat's words were a deliberate insult intended for her deliverer of the preceding day.

Wat on his part pushed his chair noisily back from the table, and rapped nervously and defiantly with his knuckles on the board.

"There is not a man in my wild western isles," Barra's voice was heard going on evenly and calmly, "who would not die for his chief, giving his life as readily as a platter of drammoch—not a poor unlearned cottar who would not send his family to the death to save the honour of the clan from the least stain, or the life of the chief from any shadow of danger. The true clansman can do anything for his chief ——"

"Except tell the truth," burst in Walter Gordon fiercely.

Barra paused a moment and looked calmly at the interrupter. Then, turning a little more squarely to Kate and his hostess, he continued his speech without betraying the least annoyance.

"He will do anything for his chief which does not involve the loss of his honour and his standing in the clan."

"Does this your noble Highland honour include treachery, spying, and butchery?" cried Wat, now speaking directly to his enemy.

"It includes good manners in a lady's presence, sir," said Barra calmly.

"Do these your clansmen of honour and courtesy wear butchers' knives in their belts, and go by the name of Haxo the Bull, the Calf, and the Killer?"

Barra spread his hands abroad with a French

gesture of helplessness which was natural to him, and which expressed his inability to comprehend the vagaries and fancies of a person clearly out of his mind. Then, without betraying the least annoyance, he turned suavely to Kate, and began to tell her of the new ambassadors from Austria, who, with a great retinue, had that day arrived at the court of the Prince of Orange.

Wat rose with his hand on his sword. "Cousin Maisie," he said, "I am not a man of politic tricks nor specious concealments. I give you fair warning that I know this man. I tell him to his face that I denounce him for a traitor, a conspirator, a murderer. I find Murdo of Barra a guest in this house, and I do what I can to protect those I love from so deadly an acquaintance—the very shadow of whose name is death."

"Protect! You forget, Cousin Walter," returned Maisie indignantly, standing up very white and determined, "you forget that I have a husband who is entirely able to protect me. And you forget also that this is his house, not yours. Moreover, if you cannot suffer to meet my friends here as one guest meets another, it is entirely within your right to go where you will only meet with those of whom you are pleased to approve."

Here Walter snatched suddenly at the bonnet which had been lying on the floor: but the indignant little lady of the house in Zaandpoort Street had not yet said all her say.

"And moreover," she said, "so long as I am mistress of a hovel, neither you nor any other shall intrude your brawls and quarrels upon those whom I choose to invite to my house."

"You choose between us then?" cried Wat,

holding his head high, his face colourless as a sheet of paper.

"If you desire to put it so—yes. I choose between a man of courtesy and a silly, hectoring boy. I choose, cousin mine, not to give you the right to select my guests for me."

Wat turned to Kate. The blood had now ebbed from his lips, and left them grey. His eyes seemed in a short tale of moments to have sunk deep into his face.

"And you?" he said, more calmly than before, looking at the maid of his love.

The girl trembled like a leaf on an autumn gossamer—nevertheless, she answered firmly enough: "I am but a guest in this house, but so long as I abide here the friends of my hostess are my friends!"

Wat Gordon bowed low with stateliest courtesy, first to his cousin Maisie, then to Kate McGhie, and lastly to his rival.

"I shall have the honour of sending you a communication in the morning," he said, looking the councillor of the Prince between the eyes.

Barra sat still on his chair looking Wat over with the same calmly amused contempt he had shown throughout. "Ah," he replied, nodding his head, "perhaps it might be as well to let the—the application come in the usual way—through my chamberlain."

And he was still smiling as Wat Gordon strode down the stairs with anger burning coldly white on his face, and all hell raging in his heart.

Barra turned to Kate to continue his story, but her place was vacant. The girl had inexplicably vanished from the room before Wat's foot had even passed the threshold. She lay now on the little white bed in her own room, her whole frame shaken

with sobs, and the hot, bitter tears raining down on the pillow.

Then for the first time she knew in her own heart that she was face to face with great unreasoning love, which could neither be banished nor disowned.

"O why," she sobbed, "was he so foolish and wicked? Why did Maisie grow of a sudden so hard and cruel to him? Why must things turn out thus deadly wrong, when they might just as easily have gone right?"

She buried her face in the pillow, and whispered her conclusion to the fine linen of its coverture upon which her tears were falling.

"Yet I love him—yes, I love him more than ever for it!" she said, and sank her head deeper, as if to hide her love from her own most secret sight.

CHAPTER X

THE DESCENT OF AVERNUS

WAT staggered a little as he walked down the street of Zaandpoort. He felt somewhat like a bullock that has been felled, yet which for the moment escapes with life. The air had grown suddenly thin and cold, as it had been difficult to breathe. He drew his cloak about him and shivered.

"Well," he raged, "that at least is ended! They have done with me—made their choice. I that stood by them in many bad, old days am cast off for a rogue and a scoundrel—because, forsooth, he is an Earl and a Prince's councillor. Were I but come to my rights, they would not treat me thus! But, because I am only poor Wat Gordon of the Douglas regiment, I must be grateful for any dog's treatment."

As Wat grew to believe his own silly windy words, he held his head a little higher. And into the poor, angry, foolish boy's heart the devil cast his baited hook. Pride took hold of Wat, and the thought of revenge.

"But, after all, am I not Walter Gordon of Lochinvar," he said as he strode along, heeding none, "a gentleman at least, and now, in spite of them all, an officer also. If mine own folk and kin think nothing of me in the little lodgings of Zaandpoort Street, I

can show them that there are places more famous, where others will make Wat Gordon welcome for his own sake."

At that moment a shouting reveller ruffling it along the street, recalled to his mind that he was in the neighbourhood of the famous Hostelry of the Coronation, where nightly during the stay of the army at Amersfort all the young bloods of the allied forces met, and where (it was reported) brightest eyes shone across the wine goblet, and daintiest feet danced upon the polished floors. The Inn of the Coronation was held by mine host Sheffell. A score of times it had been closed by the city fathers, but, nevertheless, always with more or less carefully concealed intent of winking hard at its immediate reopening.

And all this was because the Burgomeister and magnates of Amersfort looked upon the Inn of the Coronation as a safety-valve for the riotous blades of the city and camp.

"For," said the former, to the more sapient of his Corporation, when he could be private with them: "If the young kerls go not to the Coronation and meet with their like—well, we are men and fathers. Like is it that we may have matters on our hands that shall trouble us more deeply. Worse were it if the rascals came rattling their spurs and tagging at the tails of our daughters and our wives."

So the sleep of mine host Sheffell, of the Hostel of the Coronation, was not disturbed by the fear of the City Council.

Towards this famous (or as it might be infamous) house, therefore, Wat turned his steps. Often the men of his regiment had offered to conduct him thither, but till now Wat had steadfastly refused, with the laugh which meant that he had to do with metal

more attractive. For in a camp it does not do to obtain a repute for a too ostentatious virtue.

But to-night Wat Gordon buckled his sword a little tighter, belted his silken orange sash closer about his new officer's coat, swung his cloak back in a more becoming fashion, twirled his moustache, passed his fingers lightly through his crisp, fair curls, and strode with jingle of huge cavalry spurs into the Hostel of the Coronation, through whose portals (safe it is to say) no more proper or desirable young man had passed that night.

Great Sheffell himself was on the watch, and greeted the young officer with profoundest courtesy. Wat vouchsafed him hardly a nod, but marched straight into a great crowded room, which hummed about him, riant with gay noise and the spangle of silver and glass.

The main guest-chamber of the Coronation was a long, fairly wide, white-panelled room, divided at the sides into more private compartments by curtains hung upon rows of pillars. The more favoured guests sat at small tables in the alcoves, and were waited on by girls attired in scarlet blouse and short embroidered silk kirtle, whose dainty hose of orange and black twinkled underneath as they passed deftly to and fro with glass and platter.

As soon as Wat entered, and began to thread his way through the laughing press, he found himself greeted from this table and that, and many were the invitations showered upon him to make one of some jocund company. But Wat only shook his head smilingly, and made his way steadily to the head of the room as if he had some appointment to keep there.

Nevertheless, he sat down listlessly enough at an

unoccupied table, and a pretty maid, in a dress daintier and fresher than that of the other attendants, instantly stood beside him with her hands clasped modestly before her.

"I wait my lord's commands," she said in excellent French.

Without giving the matter any consideration, Wat ordered a bottle of old Rhenish, and sat back to contemplate the scene at his ease. Officers of every regiment in the services of the States-General and of its allies were there, young attachés of the embassies, stray princelings of the allied German duchies—while scattered amongst these were to be seen a parti-coloured crowd of ladies with flower-decked hair, lavish of shoulder, opulent of charm.

Presently the pretty maid brought Wat his bottle of Rhenish, ancient and cobwebbed. She decanted it carefully, standing close by his shoulder, so that a subtle suggestion of feminine proximity affected the young man strangely. She poured out a full measure of the scented vintage into a huge green glass on which tritons gambolled and sea-nymphs writhed.

"You have perchance no one to drink with you?" she said, giving him a glance out of her large and lustrous eyes.

"Truly," replied Wat, "I am alone!"

And the sadness of his life seemed to culminate in a kind of mimic and desperate isolation as he spoke.

"Then," said the girl, "may I not drink first to your beautiful eyes, my captain, and then, if you will, to our better acquaintance?"

She lifted the glass to her lips, tasted it as a bird does, and presented it to Walter with the daintiest gesture.

"Your name?" he said, looking at her with a certain tolerant and almost passive interest.

"I am called 'the Little Marie!'" she smiled; "I have been wellnigh a week in the Hostel of the Coronation, and not yet have I seen any to compare with you, my lord captain of the fair locks."

With a certain childish abandon, and a freedom still more than half innocent, Marie seated herself upon the arm of the great chair into which Wat had thrown himself upon his entrance. Her dainty foot dangled over the carven finial, almost touching the ribbons at Walter's knee with its silver-buckled slipper of the mode of Paris. Marie's hand rested lightly on the small curls at the back of his neck, till Walter grew vaguely restive under the caressing fingers. Yet because he was in a great and thronged room humming with company, where none took any notice of him or his companion, each being intent on playing out his own game, the uneasy feeling soon passed away.

Only now and again as the Rhenish sank in the bottle, and the hand of the Little Marie took wider sweeps and paused more caressingly among his blonde hair, a thought awoke not unpleasantly in Wat's bosom.

"They have cast me out of their home and friendship. They have preferred a traitor. But I will let them see that there is pleasure in the world yet."

And his arm went of its own accord about the waist of the Little Marie.

. . . . . .

It seemed to be but a moment after (though it might have been an hour) that Wat looked up. A hush had fallen suddenly upon the briskly stirring din of the Hostel of the Coronation. Walter's eyes instantly caught those of a man attired in the uni-

form of the Provost-Marshal of the city. There was a cold smile of triumph on the face which met his. It was Barra, and he touched with his arm the man who stood beside him. Wat turned a little to look past the curtain which partly surrounded his table and alcove, and there, over the wide gauzy sleeves of the Little Marie, he encountered the grave and reproachful regard of his cousin, William Gordon of Earlstoun.

Wat started to his feet with a half-formed idea of going forward to explain something, he knew not what. But ere he had disengaged himself from the great chair, on the arm of which perched the Little Marie, an angry thought, born of pride and fostered by the heady antiquity of the cobwebbed Rhenish, drew him back again into his place. A kind of desperate defiance chilled him into a blank and sudden calmness, which boded no good either to himself or to any who should oppose him. Besides which, the circumstances were certainly difficult of explanation.

"They cast me out, and then immediately they follow after to spy upon me. Shall I utter a word of excuse only to be met with the sneer of unbelief? Am I not an officer of dragoons? Also am I not of age, and able to choose my company as well as they? As Wat Gordon never was a prayer-monger, so neither will he now be a hypocrite."

He glanced not uncomplaisantly at the Little Marie, who hummed a careless tune, and swung her pretty foot against his knee, happily unconscious of his trouble. Perhaps the Rhenish had taken her back again to the green slopes about her native village, and to her more innocent childhood.

"Another bottle of wine," he cried, with a heady kind of half-boyish defiance.

WAT AND MARIE IN THE INN OF THE CORONATION

"But you have not yet finished this," she answered. "Nor, indeed," she added with a roguish smile, "even paid for it."

Wat threw a pair of gold pieces on the table.

"One for the wine, and one to buy you a new pair of buckled shoes, Little Marie," he said.

"Then for luck you must drink out of the one I wear," she said, and forthwith she poured a thimbleful of the wine into the shoe, which she deftly slipped from the foot which had swung by his ribbon-knot of blue-and-white.

"Pledge me!" she cried, daring him to a match of folly, and she held the curious beaker close to his chin. Wat was conscious that his cousin stood grave and stern by the door, and that on Barra's face there hovered a strangely satisfied smile. But something angry and hot within him drove him recklessly deeper and deeper. He had no pleasure in the thing. It was as apples of Sodom in his mouth, exceeding bitter fruit; but at least he knew that he was cutting every tie that bound him to the street of Zaandpoort —to those who had despised and rejected him.

He lifted the shoe of the Little Marie in the air.

"To the owner of the prettiest foot in the world!" he cried, and pledged her.

Four men who had come in after my Lord of Barra now set themselves down at the table nearest to Wat. The Little Marie having recovered her slipper, and wiped it coquettishly with the tassels of Wat's sash, somewhat reluctantly went away to bring the second bottle of Rhenish.

During her absence Lochinvar remained behind, blowing with all his might upon the dying coals of his anger, and telling himself that he had done nothing worthy of reproach, when suddenly John

Scarlett plumped himself down into the chair opposite him. He had been in the inn all the time, but only now he had come near Walter Gordon.

"Lochinvar," he said, "'tis a sight for sore eyes to see you here! What has happened to the Covenant, that you have left the prayer-meeting and come to the Hostel of the Coronation?"

"Jack," cried Wat, "you know me better than that. Never was Walter Gordon a great lover of the Covenant all the days of his life."

"You ran gaily enough with the hare, then, at any rate!" answered John Scarlett, provokingly.

"Nay," replied Wat, "I was hunted by the pack, it is true, but that was because of the dead stroke I gave His Grace the Duke of Wellwood."

"And the beginning of that—was it not some matter of doctrine or of the kirk?" asked Scarlett, though he knew the truth well enough.

The Rhenish had been mounting to Wat's head, and his heart had grown gay and boastful.

"Nay," he cried; "very far indeed from that. 'Twas rather a matter of the favours of my lady the Duchess."

One of the men at the next table looked quickly over at Wat's words, and indeed there seemed to be but little talk among them. Contrariwise, they sat silently drinking their wine, and as it had been, listening to the talk of Wat Gordon and his companion.

Presently the Little Marie came daintying and smiling back with the wine, deftly weaving her way among the revellers, and as she went by the neighbouring table one of the men at the side on which she tried to pass made free to set his arm about her.

"Change about, my lass," he said; "'tis the turn of this table to have your pretty company. By my

faith, they have given us a maid as plain-visaged as a Gouda cheese."

The Little Marie gave a quick cry, and Wat half started to his feet and laid his hand upon his sword; but Scarlett dropped a heavy palm upon his shoulder and forced him back again into his seat. In a moment the girl had adroitly twisted herself from the clutch of the man, and, in addition, had left the marks of her nails on his cheek.

"Take that, my rascal," she cried, "and learn that spies have no dealings with honest maids."

"Good spirit, i' faith!" said Scarlett, nodding his head approvingly; but the Little Marie, coming to them with heightened colour and angry eyes, did not again set herself on the arm of Wat Gordon's chair. Instead she drew a high stool to the side of the table, midway between Wat and Scarlett. Then she placed her arm upon the table-cloth, and leaned her chin upon the palms of her hand.

"Abide by us," said Walter, who could not bear that so fair and light a thing should be left to the ill-guided mercies of such a mangy pack as were drinking at the next table.

The second supply of Rhenish, with the capable assistance of Scarlett, sank apace in its tall flask, and at each glass Wat's voice mounted higher and higher. He could be heard all over the room, declaiming upon the merits of Scottish men, offering to defend with his life the virtue and beauty of Scottish maids, or in case none should be willing to call these in question, then he was equally ready to draw sword on behalf of the dignity and incorruptibility of Scottish judges.

The guest-room of the Coronation was for a while disposed to listen with amused wonder. Presently the four men at the table near Wat became five.

The new-comer proved to be a short-necked, red-faced, deeply-scarred man, dressed in the uniform of the Provost-Marshal's guards. The wine in Wat's brain prevented him for the time from recognising his ancient enemy, Haxo the Bull; but Haxo the Bull nevertheless it was.

Scarlett was now most anxious to get Wat away in safety. There was also a gleam of almost piteous appeal in the eyes of the Little Marie.

"My captain," she said, bending over and laying her hand on his sleeve, "it is high time for you to go to your quarters; you can come and see me again in the morning if you will."

For Wat was now talking louder than ever, and beating for emphasis upon the table with his hand.

"And I repeat that whoever casts a slur upon the virtue and beauty of a Scots maid has to settle accounts with Wat Gordon of Lochinvar ——"

The men at the nearest table had also begun talking loudly, and the voice of Haxo pierced the din.

"I tell you the girl is safely my master's meat, and she is a dainty filly enough. Her name is Kate McGhie, and she is a landowner's daughter somewhere in the barren land of Scots. My lord bought her goodwill quickly enough with a gay present for herself, and a commission for her gossip's loutish husband—trust Barra for that. He is never laggard in his affairs with women."

Wat Gordon was on his feet in an instant. The Little Marie instinctively shrank aside from the white fierce face which she encountered. It looked like the countenance of some one whom she had never seen. The young man fairly spurned the table at which he had been sitting, and with a single spring he was over the next and at the breast of Haxo the Bull.

"Villain, you lie in your throat," he shouted, "and I will kill you for your lie! 'Tis false as the lying tongue which I will presently tear out of your foul mouth!"

The four men rose simultaneously and drew, some of them their swords and the others their daggers. Wat would instantly have been stabbed among them, but that the Little Marie, dashing forward like a hawk, threw her arms about the nearest of his foes, for a moment pinioning his hands to his side.

Then Scarlett, with a sweep of his sword, leaped on the table in the midst of them, crying, "Fair play! Stand back there, all of you who do not want to be spitted."

Presently, finding Wat's grasp relax on his throat as he reached for his weapon, Haxo shook himself free and drew the hanger which, in honour of his advancement, he wore instead of his butcher's knife. Wat had neither room nor yet time to draw his long sword; but with quick baresark fury he caught up by the leg the heavy oaken chair on which Haxo had been sitting, and, twirling it over his head like a staff he struck the brawny butcher with the carved back of it fair on the temple, almost crushing in his cheek. The Bull dropped to the floor without a groan.

Then there ensued a battle fierce and fell in that upper corner of the great room of the Coronation. There Wat stood at bay with the oaken chair in his hand, while Scarlett's long sword turned every way, and even the Little Marie, long unaccustomed to courtesy, showed her fidelity to the salt of kindness she had tasted. She crouched low behind the fighters, almost on her knees, and waited for a chance to strike upward with the dagger she held in her hand. But

the long room swarmed black with their foes. The remaining four had already been reinforced by half a dozen others, and the way to the door seemed completely blocked. Then it was that Scarlett raised the rallying cry, "Scots to me! Hither to me, blue bonnets all!"

And through the press were thrust the burly shoulders of Sergeant Davie Dunbar and two of his comrades. All might now have gone differently, but for the madness working in the brain of Wat of Lochinvar. For the insult to his sweetheart's good name, uttered by Haxo, had made him resolve to kill every man at the table who had heard the blasphemous slander.

"Arrest him!" the Provost-Marshal's men cried. "He has murdered Haxo!"

"Die, rogues and liars all!" shouted Wat, rushing at them in yet fiercer wrath.

And without further parley he brought his chair down upon the shoulder of the nearest, who sank on his face stunned with the mighty blow.

"Good Scots to the rescue!" cried Scarlett, as was his custom engaging two men at a time with his point and easily keeping them in play.

So in this fashion, Wat leading and striking all down in his way with a kind of desperate fury, Scarlett and Davie Dunbar with the other two Scots, pressing as closely after him as they could, the small compact band made its way steadily and slowly towards the outgate of the Hostel of the Coronation.

"Lord help us all!" cried the more terrified of their opponents; "let us get out of the way of these praying Blue Bonnets when they are angered."

For the floor began to be sprinkled with groaning men who had dropped from the blades of the out-

landers, and with stunned and maimed men stricken down by the fierce vigour of Wat's barbaric onslaught.

Yet, in spite of all, it was a long time before the steadfast five could force their way to the street.

By this time Wat held his chair by its only surviving leg, and the blades of the small Scots phalanx dripped blood into their own basket hilts. The street without was packed with townspeople, and even the watch could not make way to apprehend them. When the Scots finally came forth into the night it might, indeed, have gone very ill with them, had it not been that a patrol of Frisian horse chanced to pass at that moment in front of the Hostel of the Coronation.

To them Scarlett cried out in their own country speech (with which he was somewhat acquainted), "Help there for certain true soldiers of the Prince cruelly beset by townsfolk!"

Now this was the very wisest word he could have spoken. For whatever private discontents they might cherish, all the soldiers of the camp were of the faction of their general, when it came to choosing between the Prince of Orange and the turbulent and rebellious municipality of Amersfort. The patrol swiftly opened out, and presently enclosed the five Scots between their files. Thus they were able to pass safely through the howling mob, which, however, made ugly rushes at them as they went.

Presently they came to the headquarters of the portion of the force domiciled in the city.

Wat, who for a time had been entirely sobered by the fierce excitement of battle, now again felt his head reel with the sudden, sharp chill of the night air.

Yet when the prisoners were confronted with the

officer of the night, he at once stepped forward and, without hesitation, assumed the sole responsibility for the affair.

"I fear I have slain a man—or mayhap more than one," he said; "but these, my friends, have had no part in the quarrel. They but assisted me to fight my way out."

"Your name and regiment, sir?" said the officer in charge, civilly enough.

"I am Walter Gordon, captain in Douglas' regiment of Dragoons," replied Walter, readily enough.

"Let Captain Gordon be taken to the military prison and there kept in the safest cell," interrupted the clear, high voice of Barra. He had entered unobserved, having followed the patrol along the street. The officer of the night saluted the high councillor of the Prince and present Provost-Marshal of the camp and city of Amersfort.

Walter was therefore promptly delivered to the officer and file who had been sent to escort him, and in a moment he went out with them into the night.

"Were they souljers or civilians ye murthered, for sure?" asked the officer, as they marched along the street. He spoke the pleasant tongue of Ireland in a soft, far-reaching whisper.

"Townsfolk," returned Wat; "all except one hulking scoundrel of a Provost-Marshal's man!"

"More power to ye," said the Irishman promptly. "Give me the grip of your hand—and, by my sowl, I'll give ye a chance to run for it at the next corner.'

But Wat declined the obliging offer of the good-hearted Irishman.

"I thank you with all my heart," he said. "It is

kindly meant. But I prefer to stand my trial. Things can't be worse with me than they are!"

"Faith, it's you that knows, my son," said the Irishman; "but to Patrick Ryan's thinking a long hempen necktie, swung elegantly over a beam, might make things a deal worse for ye!"

And in a minute more the iron gate of the military prison of Amersfort had shut-to upon Wat Gordon.

CHAPTER XI

THE HEARTS OF WOMEN

BARRA and Will Gordon returned together to the lodgings in the Street of Zaandpoort. There was a sinister look of inexpressible triumph on the dark face of my Lord of Barra. When they reached home Will Gordon threw himself silently, face downwards, on the oak settle; for there arose in his heart the memory of those days, not so long ago, when he and Wat had slept under one plaid among the heather on the moors of Scotland. And the tears stood in his eyes for the thing which he had seen that night.

On their way back Barra had bubbled over with laughing sneers at the downfall of his immaculate and virtuous cousin, but Will Gordon had paced along sad and silent by his side. Ancient loyalty kept him without words, yet in his heart he condemned Lochinvar most bitterly, far more intensely indeed even than Barra.

Maisie and Kate were sitting busily sewing at their delicate white seams when the two men entered. The little Dutch lamp had been carefully trimmed, and the whole room radiated cosiest comfort. As was her wont, Kate's place was by the window, where she sat looking at her work, keeping a somewhat cold and white face steadfastly upon the monotonous business of needle and thread.

Maisie sat sad and a little reminiscent of recent

tears by the lamp. Her eyes were moist, and she did not look at all in the direction of Barra and her husband as they entered.

A sense of strain in the air paralysed conversation after the first greetings had been interchanged. These were loud and eager on the side of Barra, almost inaudible on the part of Kate and Maisie; and as for Will Gordon, he lay where he had flung himself so suddenly down upon the long oaken couch.

"Adventures are to the adventurous, and to-night we have adventured indeed," at last began my Lord Barra, speaking directly to his hostess. "Your husband, with much kindness, accompanied me on my rounds of inspection, and among other curious discoveries, it was made entirely plain to us why our polite acquaintance Lochinvar was in such a hurry to leave us."

Barra paused with a certain pleasure and appreciation of his own wit in his voice. But no one spoke in the room. Will Gordon, indeed, gave an inarticulate groan and plunged heavily over upon the settle with his face to the wall. Maisie turned her back a little more upon the speaker, while Kate bent lower upon her sewing, as if the dim light had suddenly made it harder for her to see the stitches.

"And if you hesitate to believe the extraordinary things I have to tell you, my friend here, Captain Gordon of the Covenanting regiment, will tell you where in the discharge of my duty as Provost-Marshal of the camp it was our business to penetrate, and in what company and in what circumstance we found your cousin of Lochinvar."

"We do not want to hear. It was all our fault!" said Maisie, turning suddenly full upon the speaker. Unconsciously to himself Barra had been using a

somewhat pompous and judicial tone, as though he were pronouncing judgment upon a hardened offender.

At Maisie's words, the Provost-Marshal instantly sat erect in his chair. He was exceedingly astonished. A few hours before he had seen these two women stern almost to severity over a mere breach of good manners. He could not imagine that now they would not utterly reject and condemn such a reprobate as Wat Gordon had proved himself to be. He felt that he must surely have been misunderstood, so he proceeded to make his meaning clear.

"But I tell you plainly, my ladies," Barra continued, still more impressively, "that your husband and I found your cousin of Lochinvar at the Hostel of the Coronation, of which you may have heard—there spending his living with harlots, flaunting their endearments in a public place, and afterwards brawling with the meanest and rudest boors of the camp."

"And I do not wonder!" cried Maisie Lennox emphatically, "after the way he was used in this house, which ought to have been a home to him. William Gordon, I wonder how, as a Christian man, you could permit your cousin to be so used!" she continued fiercely, turning upon her husband and bursting into tears.

Will Gordon groaned inarticulately from the settle. He had not been present at the time, but he knew well that with women such a transparent subterfuge would avail him nothing.

"Why, Maisie," he began, speaking from the depths of the pillow, "did not you yourself——"

"I do not think," said Barra, looking over to Will, "that your wife understands that the Hostel of the

Coronation is, of all the haunts of sin in this city of Amersfort, the vilest and the worst. The man who would make his good name a byword there, is certainly unfit to have the honour of admission into a circle so gracious, into society so pure, as that in which I first found him. I speak as the censor of the morals of the army, and also as one who has suffered many things for conscience' sake and in order to deserve the praise of them that do well."

Kate looked up for the first time since Will and Barra had come in.

As the latter finished speaking he noticed that her eyes were very dark, and yet at the same time very bright. The black of the pupil had overspread the iris so that the whole eye at a distance appeared dark as ink, but deep within the indignant light of a tragic love burnt steadily, like a lamp in the night.

The girl spoke quickly and clearly, as if the words had been forced from her.

"Had I been so used at the only place I called home,' when I was a stranger in a strange land, I tell you all I should have gone straight to the Hostel of the Coronation—or worse, if worse might be!" she cried indignantly.

"And so also would I," cried Maisie, with still greater emphasis, sticking her needle viciously into the table and breaking it as she spoke.

The settle creaked as Will Gordon leaped to his feet.

"Silly women, ye ken not what ye say!" he said sternly. "Be wise and plead rather with the man in whose hands our cousin's very life may lie, for the deeds of this black night."

"His life—his life!" cried instantly Maisie and Kate together.

The latter rose to her feet, letting all her white bravery of seamstressing slip unheeded to the ground. Maisie, on her part, turned a pale and tear-stained face eagerly up to her husband.

"Yes," said Barra swiftly, eager to tell the story first, "it is true—his life; for Walter Gordon, being in company at the place I have mentioned with a light woman, brawled and insulted those who sat near him, offering to assert and defend her virtue at the sword's point. Then when he was withstood and threatened with arrest by my officers, as their duty was, he turned fiercely upon them and upon others, the supporters of law and order, and now he lies in prison awaiting trial for *murder!*"

Kate caught the table with her hand at the last terrible word, which Barra hissed out with concentrated fury and hatred.

"Is this true?" she said, in a low voice, making a great effort to regain her calmness. She turned to Will Gordon as she spoke.

"Nay," said Will, "indeed I know nothing of the cause of the quarrel. But certain it is that there has been a most fierce brawl, and that in the affray, certain men have been grievously wounded, if not killed."

"And is our Wat in prison?" demanded Maisie fiercely.

"He lies in the military prison of the city awaiting his trial by court-martial!" replied the Provost.

Maisie turned her about and caught her husband by the braid of his coat.

"Go you to him at once—you must! Tell him it is all our fault—we have been unhappy and to blame, Kate and I—ask him to forgive."

And, being overwrought and strained, she put her

head down on Will Gordon's breast and wept aloud.

Kate went to her and took her hand gently. And to her Maisie instantly turned, setting her husband aside with a pathetic little gesture of renunciation, as something which has been proven untrustworthy. Then, still leaning on Kate's shoulder, she passed slowly from the room. As Kate McGhie opened the door she flashed one glance, quick with measureless anger and contempt, back upon the two men who stood gazing after her. Then she passed out.

There was a long silence between the Provost-Marshal and his host after the women had disappeared.

At last Barra broke in upon the awkward pause with a laugh of scorn which ended with something like a sigh.

"Oh, women, women," he cried, "from what pits will ye not dig the clay to make you your gods!"

"He had been our friend so long, and in such bitter passes and desperate ventures," said Will Gordon excusingly, speaking of Wat in a hushed voice almost as one would speak of the dead.

Barra shrugged his shoulders to intimate that the whole sex was utterly impossible of comprehension.

"Nevertheless, you will give our poor cousin your best word and offices to-morrow?" Will Gordon went on, anxiously.

"I shall see the Prince in person," answered Barra promptly, "and I shall make my endeavour to arrange that the prisoner shall not be tried by court-martial—so that nothing summary may take place, and no sentence be hastily or vindictively carried out."

Will Gordon blanched at the word "summary,"

which in the severely disciplined army of the States-General had but one meaning.

He conducted his guest to the door in silence. The moonlight was casting deep shadows in the high-gabled Street of Zaandpoort and glittering on the pole-axes and muskets of the Provost's guard who stood without, stamping their feet impatiently and waiting the appearance of their leader.

"Till to-morrow, then!" said Will Gordon, as he parted.

"Till to-morrow!" replied the Provost-Marshal, more heartily than he had yet spoken, giving him his hand.

But as he walked down the street toward the camp he smiled a smile from under the thin drooping moustache which showed his teeth. They glittered white in the moonlight like a dog's.

CHAPTER XII

THE PRISON OF AMERSFORT

THE prison of the city of Amersfort stood at the corner of one of its most ancient streets, and the military portion of it exposed a long scarped wall to the public, broken only by a single line of small windows triply barred with iron stanchions of the thickness of a man's wrist. These windows were only separated from the street by a low wall and a strong but wide-meshed railing of wrought iron. In the large room of the gaol, where only those prisoners were kept who were detained for slight offences, or who awaited trial, the unglazed squares of the window were large enough to admit of a pole and small basket being protruded, so that it should hang within reach of the passers-by. One of the inmates was appointed to stand with this curious fishing-rod in his hand, and the plaintive wail, "Remember the poor prisoners of the Prince!" resounded all day along the ancient thoroughfare.

But Wat was too important a guest to be placed in this common room. By special direction of the Provost-Marshal he had a cell assigned to him in a tower only a few yards above the level of the street. His apartment had two windows, one of which being in the belly of the tower looked up and down the thoroughfare. He could see the passengers as they went to and fro, and if any had cared to stop he might even have spoken with them.

Wat paid little attention to the street for the first day or two which he passed in the cell. Mostly he sat on the low pallet bed with his head sunk deeply in his hands. He gave himself up completely to melancholy thoughts. During the first day he had expected every hour to be brought before a military tribunal. But the fact that the day passed without incident more discomposing than the visits of the turnkey with his scanty meals, informed Wat that he was not to be tried by any summary method of jurisdiction,—though in the angry state of the feelings of the army against the townsfolk of Amersfort, and especially considering the chronically smouldering hatred of the Provost-Marshal's men, this would doubtless have been Wat's best chance.

But his mortal enemy did not wish to run the risk of seeing his rival set free with but some slight penalty, and, being in a position of great influence, he had his will. Day by day passed in the prison, each wearier and greyer than the other. Finally, Wat took to his barred windows and watched the stream of traffic. As the poignancy of his regret dulled to a steady ache, he became deeply interested in the boys who sported in the gutters and sailed ships of wood and paper in every spate and thundershower. He watched for the rosy-cheeked maids with their black, clattering sabots who paused a moment to adjust their foot-gear with a swish of pleated skirts and a glimpse of dainty ankle; and then, having once stopped, stood a long time gossiping with their plain-visaged, flat-capped, broad-breeched lovers. Above all, Wat loved the vagrant dogs which wandered lazily about the shady corners and fought each other like yellow, whirling hoops in the dust.

Often he would leave his meagre meal untouched

in order to watch them. One dog in particular interested him more than all the human beings in the Street of the Prison. He was a long, thin-bodied beast of a yellowish-grey colour, of no particular ancestry, and certainly without personal charms of any kind, save as it might be those incident to phenomenal and unredeemed ugliness.

To this ignoble hound Wat daily devoted a large proportion of his dole of bread. It amused him to entice the beast each day nearer to the railings, and then, while other stouter and better-favoured animals were for the moment at a distance, Wat would deftly propel a pellet of bread to this faithful attendant. At first, the pariah of the Street of the Prison suspected a trap. For during an eventful life, he had on several occasions been taken in with pepper balls and second-hand mustard plasters, by the brisk young men of the hospitals and of the Netherlands trading companies.

Now it chanced that while Wat thus played good Samaritan to a cur of the gutter, two women stood at the outer gate of the prison. It was not the first occasion they had been there, nor yet the first time they had been denied entrance.

Maisie and Kate, with women's generosity and swift repentance, still blaming themselves deeply for their hastiness, had gone to inquire for Lochinvar early on the morning after he had been put in prison.

But neither by persuasions nor yet with all their little store of money could they buy even a moment's interview. The jailor's orders were too imperative. Some one high in authority had given the sternest injunctions that no one was to be allowed to see the prisoner on any pretext. Will had accompanied them on one occasion in his new officer's uniform, and even

discovered in the chief turnkey an old comrade of Groningen. But it was vain. Strict obedience to his instructions was the keeper's life, as well as his bread and his honour. Simply he dared not, he said, permit any to see that particular prisoner.

But, had they known it, there was a way of access to Wat. As they came out of the prison gates they met Barra. The Provost-Marshal, with a gloomy countenance, informed them that the Prince took a very serious view of the affair of their cousin. However, he was in hopes that the sentence, though severe and exemplary, would not in any case be one of death. Probably, however, it might involve a very long period of imprisonment.

"The Prince and his Council have resolved that an example must be made. There have been, they say, far too many of these brawls in the army. It is such occurrences which breed ill-blood betwixt the soldiers and the townsfolk."

"But in that case," said Maisie, "why not persuade the Prince to make an example of somebody else—not, surely, of our cousin Wat?"

Barra shrugged his shoulders.

"I am afraid," he said softly, "that we cannot always arrange matters so that the penalties shall fall on shoulders whose sufferings will not hurt us. But you, dear ladies, can wholly trust me to use all my influence, so that your friend may soon find himself again at liberty."

Thus talking, they had turned to the right, and were now walking down the street of the prison. Maisie went a little ahead with her hand on her husband's arm, thinking that perhaps if Kate were left to herself, she might be able to move the Provost-Marshal to kindlier purposes. Barra lingered as much

as he could, in order to separate Kate and himself as widely as possible from the pair in front.

They passed close to Wat's window, and the prisoner watched them go by with black despair in his heart.

As they reached the gloomy angle of the prison, Barra indicated, with a wave of his hand, a remarkable gargoyle in the shape of a devil's head, frowning from the battlements of the grey, beetling tower. Through the closed bars of his window Wat noticed the gesture, as Barra intended that he should.

"My God!" he cried aloud to the deaf walls, "he has brought her this way to gloat with her over my prison-house!"

And he flew at the bars of his window, striking and shaking them till his hands were bruised and bleeding.

"Let me get out! God in heaven! Let me get out—that I may kill him!" he cried, in the madness of agony.

But the bars resisted his utmost endeavour. Not so much as a particle of mortar stirred, and after spending all his strength in vain, Wat fell back on his hard pallet utterly exhausted, and lay there for hours in a vague and dazed unconsciousness.

The sullen, tranced hours verged towards evening and Wat still lay motionless.

The keeper had twice been to his cell with food. But finding on the occasion of his second visit the previous supply of bread and water untouched, he had merely laid down the small loaf of black bread which was served out to the prisoners every night, and so departed.

At intervals a low voice seemed to steal into Wat's cell through the silence of the prison.

"A friend would speak with you—a friend would speak with you."

The words came up from the street beneath. At the third or fourth repetition Wat rose wearily and, with a dull and hopeless heart, went to the window whence he was wont to feed the dog with pellets of bread in the morning. A girl, small and slim of body, plainly attired in a black dress, stood directly underneath. Wat was about to turn back again to his couch, thinking that the summons could not have been intended for him, when the maid eagerly beckoned him to remain.

"Do you not remember me?" she said; "I am the Little Marie. I have never gone back to the Hostel of the Coronation. I have been very wicked. I know I have brought you here. I know that you cannot forgive me; but tell me something—anything that I may do for you?"

"It is not at all your fault that I am here," replied Wat Gordon, "only that of my own mad folly. Do not reproach yourself, nor trouble yourself, I pray you. There is nothing at all that you can do for me——"

"No one you love to whom I could carry a message—a letter?" The girl looked wistfully up at him as she said this. "I would deliver it so safely, so secretly."

A little before, Wat would gladly, eagerly indeed, have accepted the offer, and sent her at once to the Street of Zaandpoort, in spite of his dismissal. But now his eyes had seen.

"Nay, Little Marie," he said, smiling sadly. "There is no one whom I love, no one who cares in the least to hear of me or of my welfare."

The girl stood still, plucking at the lace on her black sleeve, and looking down.

"Run home now, Little Marie," said Wat kindly. "I am glad you have left the Hostel of the Coronation. Do not go back there any more."

The girl stood still in her place beneath the window.

At last she said, without looking up, "There is one whom you do not love, who cares much that you are in prison and alone!"

"And who may that be, Marie—old Jack Scarlett, mayhap?"

The girl looked up for a moment, a sudden, flashing look through blinding tears.

"Only bad-hearted Little Marie—that would die for you!" she said brokenly.

And without caring even to wipe away her tears, she walked slowly down the midst of the Street of the Prison, seeing no one at all, and answering none of the greetings that were showered upon her.

CHAPTER XIII

MY LORD OF BARRA'S VOW

KATE stood at her favourite window, looking down upon five little boys playing barley-break in a solemn plantigrade Dutch fashion in the dust of Zaandpoort Street by the Canal. Opposite her stood Barra. He was dressed in his customary close-fitting suit of black velvet, and his slim waist was belted by the orange sash of a High Councillor, while by his side swung a splendid sword in a scabbard of gold. A light cape of black velvet was about his shoulders, and its orange lining of fine silk drooped gracefully over his arm.

"Listen to me, dear lady," he was saying. "I am a soldier, and not a courtier. I have not glozing words to woo you with. No more than a plain man's honest words. I love you, and from that I shall never change. At present I can offer you but a share of the exile's bitter bread. But when the Prince comes to his own, there shall be none in broad Scotland able to count either men or money with Murdo, Earl of Barra and of the Small Isles."

"My Lord Barra," said Kate, "I thank you for your exceeding courtesy. I feel your surpassing condescension. But I cannot marry you now nor yet again. If I loved you at all, I should be proud and glad to take you by the hand and walk out of the door with you into the wide world—for you renouncing

friends, fame, wealth, all, as if they were so many dead leaves of the autumn. But since I do not and cannot love you, believe that the proffer of great honour and rank can never alter my decision. This, indeed, I have told you before."

"Well do I know," answered the High Councillor, "that you have spoken, concerning me, words hard and cruel to be borne. But that was before either of us understood the depth of my devotion—before you knew that I desired, as I seek for salvation, to make you scarcely less in honour than the Queen herself, among those Isles of the sea, where true hearts abide. The cause of our religion is great. Help me to make of our Scotland a land of faith and freedom. Love me for the sake of the cause, Kate, if not for mine own most unworthy sake."

"The cause is indeed still great and precious to me. I have been honoured to suffer the least things for it. Nevertheless, the cause is not to be served by one doing wrong, but by many doing right. You are (I believe it) an honourable man, my Lord Barra. You will serve your master faithfully till that good day comes when Scotland shall again have freedom to worship under kirk-rigging or roof-tree, or an it liketh her under the broad span of the sky."

"But you carry in your heart the image of a traitor," said Barra a little more fiercely, "a double traitor, one whom I have seen false, both to his country and to you. Know you that only my bare word stands between your lover and death?"

"I know not whether Walter Gordon be dead or alive," replied Kate gently. "I say not that I love him, nor yet that he loves me. I do not know. But I say that if he does love me, in the only way I care to be loved, he would rather die a thousand deaths

than that, in order to preserve his life, his true love should wed a man whom she cares not for either as lover or as husband."

"Then you will not love me?" said he, bending his head towards her as if to look into her soul.

"I cannot, my Lord Barra," she made him answer; "love comes not like a careful manservant. It runs not like a well-trained dog at the sounding of a whistle. One cannot draw back the arras of the heart, and say to Love, 'Hither and speedily!' The wind bloweth, say the preachers, where it listeth. And so Love also comes not with observation. Rather like a thunderstorm, it bears victoriously up against the wind. For just when the will is most set against love, then it takes completest possession of the heart."

"Could you have loved me," he asked, more calmly, "if you had known no other? If the other existed not?"

"That I know not," said Kate. "All my life long I have never loved man or woman where I wanted to love, or was bid to love. Whether therefore, in this case or that, one could have loved serves no purpose in the asking. Nor indeed can it be answered. For the only issue is, that of a surety I love you not. And do you, my lord, of your most gentle courtesy, take that answer as one frankly given by an honest maid, and so depart content. There are in this land and in our own country a thousand fairer, a thousand worthier than I."

"Kate," said Barra, more intently and tenderly than he had yet spoken, "some day, and in some isle of quiet bliss where all evil and untoward things are put behind us, I will yet make you love me. For never have I thus set all my fancy on any woman before. And by the word of Murdo, Lord of Barra,

none but you will I wed, and by the honour of my clan, no other shall have you but I!"

He held out his hand. Kate, desiring him to go, gave him hers a little reluctantly. He bent to it and kissed it fervently.

"On this hand I swear," he said slowly and solemnly, "that while I live it shall be given in marriage to none other, but shall be mine alone. By the graves that are green on the Isle of Ashes and by the honour of the thirty chieftains of Barra—I swear it."

Kate took her hand quickly again to her.

"Ye have taken a vain oath, my Lord," she said, "for marriage and the giving of a hand are not within the compulsion of one, but are the agreement of two. And if this hand is ever given to a man, my heart shall go with it, or else Kate McGhie's marriage-bed shall be her resting-grave!"

. . . . . .

It was but two years since the Little Marie had carried her first basket of flowers to the streets of Brussels. From an ancient farm nigh to the city she had come, bringing with her her fresh complexion, her beauty, her light, swift, confident, easily influenced spirit.

Then, while yet a child, she had been hunted down, petted, betrayed, and forsaken by the man who, being on a visit to Brussels, had first been attracted by her childish simplicity. It chanced that in the dark days of her despair she had found her way to Amersfort, and finally to the Hostel of the Coronation. She had been there but a bare week when Wat came into her life, and his words to the girl were the first of genuine, unselfish kindness she had listened to in that abode of smiling misery and radiant despair.

As a trampled flower raises its head after a gentle rain, so her scarcely dulled childish purity reawakened within her, and with it—all the more fiercely that it came too late—the love that suffereth all things and upbraideth not. Marie was suddenly struck to the heart by the agony of her position. She might love, but none could give her back true love in return. Her soul abode in blank distress after the fray had been quelled and Walter led away to prison. Without speech to any at the inn of the Coronation, Marie fled to the house of a decent woman of her own country, who undertook the washing and dressing of fine linen—dainty cobweb frilleries for the ladies of the city, and stiffer garmentry for the severe and sober court of the Princess of Orange.

For love had been a plant of swift growth in the lush and ill-tended garden of the girl's heart. Constantly after this both dawn and dusk found her beneath Wat's window. Marie contrived a little basket attached to a rope, which he let down from the window in the swell of the tower. She it was who instructed Wat how to make the first cord of sufficient length and strength by ravelling a stocking and replaiting the yarn. In this fashion Marie brought to Wat's prison-cell such fruits as the warehouses of the Nederlandish Companies afforded—strange-smelling delicacies of the utmost Indies, and early dainties from gardens nearer home. Linen, too, fresh and clean, she brought him, and flowers—at all of which for the consideration of a dole of gold the gaoler winked, so that Wat's heart was abundantly touched by the pathetic devotion of the girl. Scarce could she be induced to accept the money which Wat put into her basket when he let it down again. And even then Marie took the gold only that she might have

the means of obtaining other delicacies for Wat—such as were beyond the reach of purchase out of the meagre stipend she received from the laundress of fine linen with whom her working days were spent.

More seldom did Marie come to the Street of the Prison in the evening after the work of the day was done. For there were many who knew her moving to and fro in these early summer twilights, so that she feared that her mission might be observed, and Wat moved to another cell, out of reach of the Street of the Prison.

But one afternoon of sullen clouds and murky weather, when few people were abroad upon the streets of Amersfort, Marie sickened of the hot, steamy atmosphere of the laundry and the chatter of the maids of the quarter, in which she was allowed to have no part. She finished her work earlier than the others—perhaps for that reason—and stole quietly away to the tower of Wat's prison, where it jutted out over the cobble stones of the pavement.

Wat was at his post, looking out as usual upon the slackening traffic and quickening pleasure-seeking of the street. He was truly glad to see the girl, and greeted her appearance with a kind smile.

"I had not expected you till the morning," he said. "But I have lived on the freshness of your flowers all day. I have also had my cell washed. Black Peter, my gaoler, was inclined to be complaisant to me this morning. It is his birthday, he says."

Wat smiled as he said it. For he had bestowed one of his few remaining coins upon Peter; which, ever since, that worthy had been swallowing to his good health in the shape of pure Hollands. Indeed, at this moment there came from below the rollicking

voice of jolly Black Peter, singing a song which ran through a catalogue of camp pleasures and soldierly delights, such as certainly could not all have been enjoyed within the grim precincts of the prison of Amersfort.

"You are sure that there is no friend I can take a message to?" asked the Little Marie for the fiftieth time; "no beloved mistress to whom I can carry a letter?"

"None," said Wat, smiling sadly. "But there," he continued, pointing quickly across the Street of the Prison at a man hurrying out of sight, "is one whom, an it please you, you may take note of. I am not able to show you a friend. But yonder goes my heart's enemy. There at the corner—the dark man in the suit of velvet, with the orange-lined cloak and the sword hilted with gold."

The Little Marie darted across the street in a moment, and threaded her way deftly among the boisterous traffic of the huxters' stalls. Presently she came back. There was a new and dangerous excitement in her eye.

"I know him," she said; "it is my Lord Barra, the Provost-Marshal. He is your enemy, you say. It is well. But he was my enemy before he was yours. Sleep sound," she continued, looking up at him with an eye as clear and peaceful as a cloistered nun's. "Take no thought for your enemy, but only, ere you sleep, say a prayer to your Scottish God for the sinful soul of the Little Marie that loves you better than her life."

CHAPTER XIV

MAISIE'S NIGHT QUEST

IN the Street of Zaandpoort upon a certain evening it had grown early dark. The sullen, sultry day had broken down at the gloaming into a black and gurly night of rain, which came in fierce dashes, alternating with fickle, veering flaws and yet stranger lulls and stillnesses. Anon, when the rain slackened, the hurl of the storm overhead could be heard, while up aloft every chimney in Amersfort seemed to shriek aloud in a different key. Maisie had gone down an hour ago and barred the outer door with a stout oaken bolt, hasping the crossbar into its place as an additional precaution. She would sit up, she said, till William returned from duty, and then she would be sure to hear him approach. On a still night she could distinguish his footsteps turning out of the wide spaces of the Dam into the echoing narrows of the Street of Zaandpoort.

She and Kate sat between the newly-lighted lamp and the fire of wood which Maisie had insisted on making in order to keep out the gusty chills of the night. A cosier little upper-room there was not to be found in all Amersfort.

But there had fallen a long silence between the two. Maisie as usual was thinking of William. It troubled her that her husband had that day gone abroad without his blue military overcoat, and she declared over and over that he would certainly come

home wet from head to foot. Kate's needle paused, lagged, and finally stopped altogether. Her dark eyes gazed long and steadily into the fire. She saw a black and gloomy prison cell with the wind shrieking into the glassless windows. She heard it come whistling and hooting through the bars as though they were infernal harp-strings. And she thought at once bitterly and tenderly, of one who might be even then lying upon the floor without either cloak or covering.

A sharp, hard sob broke into Maisie's pleasant reverie. She went quickly over to the girl, and sat down beside her.

"Be patient, Kate," she said, "it will all come right if you bide a little. They cannot kill him, for none of the men who were wounded are dead—though for their own purposes his enemies have tried to make the Prince believe so."

Kate lifted her head and looked piteously at Maisie.

"But even if he comes from prison, he will never forgive me. It was my fault—my fault," she said, and let her head fall again on Maisie's shoulder.

"Nay," said Maisie; "but I will go to him, and own to him that the fault was mine—tell him that he was not gone a moment before I was sorry, and ran after him to bring him back. He may be angry with me if he likes; but, at least, he shall understand that you were free from blame."

But this consolation, perhaps because it was now repeated for the fiftieth time, somehow failed to bring relief to Kate's troubled heart.

"He will never come back, I know," she said; "for I sent him away! Oh, how I wish I had not sent him away! Why—why did you let me?"

Maisie's mouth dropped to a pathetic pout of despair. It was so much easier comforting a man, she thought, than a girl. Now, if it had been William——

But at that moment a loud and continuous knocking was heard at the outer door, which had been so carefully barred against the storm.

"It is my dear!" cried Maisie, jumping eagerly to her feet, "and I had not heard his footstep turn into the street."

And she looked reproachfully at Kate, as though in this instance she had been entirely to blame.

"It is the first time that I ever missed hearing that," she said, and ran quickly down the stairs. As she threw open the fastenings a noisy gust of wind rioted in, and slammed all the doors with claps like thunder.

"William," she cried, "dear lad, forgive me; I could not hear your foot for the noise of the wind, though I was listening. Believe me that——"

But it was the face of an unknown man which confronted her. He was clad in a blue military mantle, under which a uniform was indistinctly seen.

"Your pardon, madam," he said, looking down upon her, "are you not Mistress Gordon, the wife of Captain William Gordon, of the regiment of the Covenant?"

"I am indeed his wife," said Maisie, with just pride; "what of him?"

"I am bidden to say that he urgently requires your presence at the guard-house."

Maisie felt all the warm blood ebb from about her heart. But she only bit her lip, and set her hand hard over her breast.

"He is ill—he is dead!" she panted, scarce knowing what she said.

"Nay," said the man, "not ill, and not dead. But he sends you word that he needs you urgently."

"You swear to me that he is not dead?" she said, seizing him fiercely by the wet cuff of his coat. For the man had laid his hand upon the edge of the wind-blown door to keep it steady as he talked, or perhaps in fear lest it should be shut in his face before his errand was accomplished.

Without waiting for another word besides the man's reiterated assurance, Maisie fled upstairs, and telling Kate briefly that her husband needed her and had sent for her to the guard-room, she thrust a sheathed dagger into her bosom, and ran back down to the outer door.

"Bide a moment, and I will come with you!" cried Kate after her.

"No, no," answered Maisie, "stay you and keep the house. I shall not be long away. Keep the water hot against William's return."

So saying, she shut the outer door carefully behind her, and hurried into the night.

Maisie had expected that the man who had brought the message would be waiting to guide her, but he had vanished. The long Street of Zaandpoort was bare and dark from end to end, lit only by the lights within the storm-beaten houses where the douce burghers of Amersfort were sitting at supper or warming their toes at an early and unwonted fire.

Then for the first time it occurred to Maisie that she did not know whether her husband would be found at the guard-house of the Palace, or at that by the city port where was the main entrance to the camp. She decided to try the Palace first.

With throbbing heart the young wife ran along the rain-swept streets. She had thrown her husband's

cloak over her arm as she came out, with the idea of making him put it on when she found him. But she was glad enough, before she had ventured a hundred paces into the dark, roaring night, to draw it closely over her own head, and wrap herself from head to foot in it.

As she turned out upon the wide spaces of the Dam of Amersfort, into which Zaandpoort Street opened, she almost ran into the arms of the watch. An officer, who went first with a lantern, stopped her.

"Whither away so fast and so late, maiden?" he said; "an thou give not a fitting answer, we must have thee to the spinning-house."

"I am the wife of a Scottish officer," said Maisie, nothing daunted. "And he being, as I think, taken suddenly ill, has sent for me by a messenger, whom in the darkness I have missed."

"Your husband's name and regiment?" demanded the leader of the watch, abruptly yet not unkindly.

"He is called William Gordon," she said, "and commands to-night at the guard-house. He is a captain in the Scots Regiment, called that of the Covenant."

The officer turned to his band.

"What regiments are on guard to-night?"

"The Scots psalm-singers at the Palace — Van Marck's Frisians at the port of the camp," said a voice out of the dark. "And if it please you, I know the lady. She is a main brave one, and her husband is a good man. He carried the banner at Ayrsmoss, a battle in Scotland where many were slain, and after which he was the only man of the Hill folk left alive."

"Go with her thou, then," commanded the officer, "and bring her in safety to her husband. It is not

fitting, madam, that you should be on the streets of the city at midnight and alone. Good-night and good speed to you, lady. Men of the city guard, forward!"

And with that the watch swung briskly up the street, the light of their leader's lantern flashing this way and that across the darkling road, as it dangled in his hand or was swayed by the fitful wind.

It seemed but a few minutes before Maisie's companion was challenging the soldiers of the guard at the Palace.

"Captain William Gordon? Yea, he bides within," said a stern-visaged sergeant in the gusty outer port. "Who might want him at this time of night?"

"His wife!" said the soldier of the watch, indicating Maisie with his hand.

The sergeant bent his brows, as if he thought within him that this was neither hour nor place for the domesticities. Nevertheless, he opened an inner door, saluted upon the threshold, spoke a few words, and waited.

Will Gordon himself came out almost instantly in full uniform. One cheek was somewhat ruddy with sitting before the great fire, which cast pleasant gleams through the doorway into the outer hall of the guard.

"Why, Maisie!" he cried, "what do you here, lassie?"

He spoke in the kindly Scots of their Galloway Hills.

Maisie started back in apprehensive astonishment.

"Did you not send for me, William? A messenger brought me word an hour ago, or it may be less, that you needed me most urgently. I thought you had been sick, or wounded at the least. So I spared not,

but hasted hither alone, running all the way. But I came on the watch, and the officer sent this good man with me."

Will Gordon laughed.

"Some one hath been playing April fool overly late in the day. If I catch him I will swinge him tightly therefor. He might have put thee in great peril, little one."

"I had a dagger, William," said Maisie determinedly, putting her hand on her breast; "and had I a mind I could speak bad words also, if any had dared to meddle with me."

"Well, in a trice I shall be relieved," he said. "Come in by the fire. 'Tis not exactly according to the General's regulations. But I will risk the Prince coming on such a night—or what would be worse, Mr. Michael Shields, who is our regimental chaplain and preceptor-general in righteousness."

Presently they issued forth, Maisie and her husband walking close together. His arm was about her, and the one blue military cloak proved great enough for two. They walked along, talking right merrily, to the Street of Zaandpoort. At the foot of the stair they stopped with a gasp of astonishment. The door stood open to the wall.

"It hath been blown open by the wind," said Will Gordon.

They went upstairs, Maisie first, and her husband standing a moment to shake the drops of rain from the cloak.

"Kate, Kate, where are you?" cried Maisie as she reached the landing-place a little out of breath, as at this time was her wont.

But she recoiled from what she saw in the sitting-room. The lamp burned calmly and steadily upon

its ledge. But the chairs were mostly overturned. The curtain was torn down, and flapped in the gusts through the window, which stood open towards the canal. Kate's Bible lay fluttering its leaves on the tiles of the fireplace. The floor was stained with the mud of many confused footmarks. A scrap of lace from Kate's sleeve hung on a nail by the window. But in all the rooms of the house in the Street of Zaandpoort there was no sign of the girl herself. She had completely vanished.

Pale to the lips, and scarce knowing what they did, Will Gordon and his wife sat down at opposite sides of the table, and stared blankly at each other without speech or understanding.

CHAPTER XV

A NIGHT OF STORM

I WILL now tell the thing which happened to Kate in the house in Zaandpoort Street that stormy night when for an hour she was left alone.

When Maisie went out, Kate heard the outer door shut with a crash as the wind rushed in. The flames swirled up the wide chimney in the sitting-room, whereupon she rose and drew the curtain across the inner door. Then she went to the wood-box and piled fresh fagots about the great back-log, which had grown red and smouldering. For a long time after she had finished she knelt looking at the cheerful blaze. She sighed deeply as if her thoughts had not been of the same complexion. Then she rose and went to the window which looked out upon the canal. It was her favourite musing-place. She leaned her brow against the half-drawn dimity curtain, and watched the rain thresh the waters till they gleamed grey-white in the sparkle of the lights along the canal bank. A vague unrest and uncertainty filled her soul.

"Wat, Wat!" she whispered, half to herself. "What would I not give if I might speak to you to-night—only tell you that I would never be hasty or angry with you again!"

And she set her hand upon her side as though she had been suddenly stricken by a pain of some

grievous sort. Yet not a pang of sharp agony, but only a dull, empty ache, lonely and hungry, was abiding there.

"How he must hate me!" she said. "It was my fault that he went away in anger. He would never have gone to that place had we not first been cruel to him here."

And in his cell, listening dully to the tramp of the sparse passers-by coming up to his window through the tumultuous blowing of all the horns of the tempest, Wat was saying to himself the same thing: "How she must hate me—thus to walk with him and let him point a scornful hand at my prison window."

But in the Street of Zaandpoort, the lonely girl's uneasiness was fast deepening into terror.

Suddenly Kate lifted her head. There was surely a slight noise at the outer door. She had a vague feeling that a foot was coming up the stair. She listened intently, but heard nothing save the creaking of doors within and the hurl of the tempest without. A thought came sharply to her, and her heart leaped palpably in her breast. Could it possibly be that Wat, released from prison, had come directly back to her? Her lips parted, and a very lovely light came into her eyes, as of late was used to do when one spoke well of Wat Gordon.

She stood gazing fixedly at the door, but the sound was not repeated. Then she looked at the place where he had stood on the threshold that first night, when he came bursting in upon them—the time when he saw her lie with her head low in Maisie's lap.

"Dear Wat!" she said softly over and over to herself, "dear, dear Wat!"

But alas! Wat Gordon was lying stretched on his

pallet in the round tower of the prison of Amersfort; while without, another maid called to him in the drenching rain, which love did not permit her to feel. He could neither hear the tender thrill in his true love's voice, nor yet respond to the pleading of her once proud heart, which love had now made gentle. He heard nothing but the roar of the wind which whirled away toward the North Sea, yelling with demon laughter as it shook his window bars, and shouted mocking words over the sill.

But all suddenly, as Kate looked again through the window, she became aware that certain of the lights on the canal edge were being blotted out. Something black seemed to rise up suddenly before the window. The girl started back, and even as she stood motionless, stricken with sudden fear, the window was forcibly opened, and a man in a long cloak, and wearing a black mask, stepped into the room. Kate was too much astonished to cry out. She turned quickly towards the door with intent to flee. But before she could reach it two men entered by it, masked and equipped like the first. None of the three uttered a word of threatening or explanation, they only advanced and seized her arms. In a moment they had wrapped Kate in a great cloak, slipped a soft elastic gag into her mouth, and carried her towards the window. The single wild cry which she had time to utter before her mouth was stopped, was whirled away by a gust yet fiercer than any of those which all night had ramped and torn their way to the sea, betwixt the irregular gables and twisted chimney-stalks of the ancient Street of Zaandpoort.

The man who had entered first through the window now received her in his arms. He clambered down by a ladder which was set on the canal bank, and

held in its position by two men. Yet another man stood ready to assist, and so in a few moments Kate found herself upon a horse, while the man who had come first through the window mounted behind her, and kept about her waist an arm of iron strength. By this time Kate was half unconscious with the terror of her position. She knew not whither she was being taken, and could make no guess at the identity of her captors.

She could, indeed, hear them talking together, but in a language which she could not understand, and which she had never before heard. The gag in her mouth did not greatly hurt her, but her arms were tightly fastened to her sides, and her cramped position on the saddle in front of her captor became, as the miles stretched themselves out behind them, an exquisitely painful one.

With the beating of the horse's hoofs the cloak gradually dropped from her eyes, so that Kate could discern dark hedge-rows and occasional trees drifting like smoke behind them as they rode. The lightning played about in front, dividing land and sky with its vivid pale-blue line. Then the thunder went roaring and galloping athwart the universe, and lo! on the back of that, the black and starless canopy shut down blacker than ever. Once, through the folds of the cloak, Kate saw a field of flowers, all growing neatly together in squares, lit up by the lightning. Every parallelogram stood clear as on a chess-board. But the colour was wholly gone out of them, all being subdued to a ghastly pallor by the fierce brilliance of the zig-zag flame.

To the dazed and terrified girl hours seemed to pass, and still the horses did not stop. At last Kate could feel, by the uneven fall of the hoofs and by the

slower pace of the beasts, that they had reached rougher country, where the roads were less densely compacted than in the neighbourhood of the traffic of a city.

Then, after a little, the iron of the horse-shoes grated sharply on the pebbles of the seashore. Men's voices cried harshly back and forth, lanterns flashed, snorting horses checked themselves, spraying the pebbles every way from their forefeet—and presently Kate felt herself being lifted down from the saddle. So stiff was she with the constraint of her position, that, but for the support of the man who helped her down, she would have fallen among the stones.

The lightning still gleamed fitfully along the horizon. The wind was blowing off shore, but steadily and with a level persistence which one might lean against. The wild gustiness of the first burst of the storm had passed away, and as the pale lightning flared up along the rough edges of the sea, which appeared to rise above her like a wall, Kate could momentarily see the slanting masts of a small vessel lying-to just outside the bar, her bowsprit pointing this way and that, as she heaved and laboured in the swell.

"You are monstrously late!" a voice exclaimed in English, and a dark figure stood between them and the white tops of the nearer waves.

Kate's conductor grunted surlily, but made no audible reply. The man in whose arms she had travelled, as in bands of iron, now dismounted, and began to swear at the speaker in strange, guttural, unintelligible oaths.

"We are to wait here for my lord!" cried the man who had lifted Kate from the saddle. He stood by her, still holding her arm securely.

His voice had a curious metallic ring in it, and an

odd upward intonation at the close of a sentence which remained in the memory.

"Indeed!" replied the voice which had first spoken; "then we, for our part, can stop neither for my lord nor any other lord in heaven or earth. For Captain Smith of Poole has weighed his anchor, and waits now only the boat's return to run for Branksea, with the wind and the white horses at his tail. Nor is he the man to play pitch-and-toss out there very long, even for his own long-boat and shipmates, with such a spanking blow astern of the *Sea Unicorn*."

"My lord will doubtless be here directly. His horse was at the door ere we left," again answered the metallic voice with the quirk in the tail of it.

"We will e'en give him other ten minutes," quoth the sailor imperturbably.

And he stood with his ship's watch in his hand, swinging his lantern up and down in answer to some signal from the ship, too faint for ordinary eyes to catch across the whip and swirl of the uneasy waves.

But he was spared any long time of waiting. For a man in uniform rode up, whose horse, even in the faint light, showed evident signs of fatigue.

"You are to proceed on board at once with your charge. My lord has been stricken down by an assassin. He lies in the palace of Amersfort, dangerously but not fatally hurt. Nevertheless, you are to carry out his directions to the letter, and at the end of your journeying he or his steward will meet you, and you shall receive the reward."

"That will not do for Captain Smith," cried the sailor emphatically. "He must have the doubloons in hand ere a soul of you quit the coast."

The man who had held Kate in his arms during her night-ride turned sharply about.

"Quit your huxtering! I have it here!" cried he indignantly, slapping his pocket as he spoke.

"Run out the boat!" shouted the man promptly, and half a dozen sailors squattered mid-thigh in the foam and swelter of the sea.

"Now, on board with you this instant!" he cried, as one accustomed to command where boats and water were in question.

Then the man with the money took Kate again in his arms, and carried her easily through the surf to where the men held the leaping craft. One by one the dripping crew and passengers scrambled in, and presently, with four stout fellows bending at the long oars, the boat gathered way through the cold grey waves of the bar towards the masts of the ship which tossed and heaved in the offing.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BREAKING OF THE PRISON

BLACK Peter Hals stood grumbling and snarling at the door of the prison of Amersfort. It was almost sundown, and the outer city ports were closed at that hour. A crowd of merrymakers had just passed on their way to sup at a dancing tavern. They had cried tauntingly to him as they went by, and the laughing loose-haired girls had beckoned tantalisingly with their hands.

"Come, thou grizzled old bunch of keys," cried one of them, in a voice that tinkled like a bell, "learn to be young again for an hour. So shalt thou cheat both Father Time, and eke Jack Ketch, thy near kinsman."

"I am waxing old, indeed, when Bonnibel taunts me unscathed," muttered Peter Hals grimly, to himself, as he watched them out of sight; "it is true there are grey hairs in my poll. But, Lord knows, I have yet in me the fire of youth. My natural strength is noneways abated. I can stand on my feet and swig down the sturdy Hollands with any man—aye, even with a city councillor at a feast of the corporation. But I rust here and mildew in this God-forsaken prison. 'Tis six o'clock of a morning, open the doors! Seven o'clock, take about the breakfast! Ten o'clock, comes a jackanapes spick-and-span officer for inspection! Two o'clock, a dozen new prisoners, and no cells to put them in!

Six o'clock, supper and complaints! Then click the bolts and rattle the keys—to bed, sleep, and begin all the pother over again on the morrow! Pshaw!—a dog's life were livelier, a-scratching for fleas. They at least bite not twice on the same spot."

Thus Black Peter Hals, discontentedly ruffling his grey badger's cockscomb on the steps of the prison of Amersfort.

As he watched, a dainty slip of a maid came up the street with a pitcher of coarse blue delf on her shoulder. In the by-going she raised her eyes to those of Peter Hals. It was but a single long glance, yet it sent his ideas every way in a fine scatter, and eke Peter's hand to his moustache that he might feel whether it were in order.

At this moment a dog ran against the girl, and the pitcher clattered to the ground, where it broke into a thousand pieces.

The maid stopped, clasped her hands pitifully, and burst into tears.

"It is all your fault," she cried, looking up at the keeper of the prison.

Peter ran down the steps and took her by the hand.

"Do not weep, sweet maid," he said, "I will buy thee a pitcher ten times better, and fill it with the best of white wine or the choicest oil, only do not cry your pretty eyes all red."

The girl stole a shy glance at Black Peter.

"Are you of the servants of the Prince?" said she, bashfully looking at the orange facing of his tunic.

Black Peter erected himself a little and squared out his chest. It was the first time that his grim prison uniform had been so distinguished.

"I am indeed the keeper of this castle of the Prince," he said with dignity.

"It is a fine castle, in truth," said the maid, looking at it up and down and crossways, with blue, wide-open, most ingenuous eyes.

"You come from the country, perhaps?" asked Peter. For such innocence was wellnigh impossible to any maid of the city.

"Aye," said the girl, "I have come from La Haye Sainte in the Flemish country of the West, where they speak French. So, therefore, I do not know your customs nor yet your speech very well. I bide with my aunt in the street but one to the right. I was sent to bring home a gallon of white wine in a new pitcher. And now it is spilled—all with looking up at you, Sir Officer, standing at the gate of your tower."

And she sped another glance at the castle keeper from under the dark seductive lashes of her almond eyes.

Black Peter stroked his moustache. It was certainly a risk, but, after all, there was no likelihood that the new Provost-Marshal would make that night the first of his visitations. Indeed, it was by no means so certain that there had been as yet any Provost appointed, after the sad accident which had happened to my Lord of Barra—"whom," said Black Peter, "may Abraham take to his bosom. For he had no mercy on poor men, who could not get their sleep for his surprises and inspections. A meddlesome Scots crow, all in his rusty black, ever croaking of duty and penalties, as if he were the hangman of Amersfort calling a poor hussy's crimes at the cart-tail."

"Come thou in by, my girl," said Black Peter, "and in a trice, if so be you can tell me the name of the shop, I will get thee a new pitcher full of wine, better far than the first. Deign to wait with me but

a moment here in the castle-hall, where there is a fine fire of sea-coal and none save ourselves to sit by it."

"I know not if my aunt would approve," said the maid uncertainly. "But, after all, you are most wondrously like my brother, who is a baker of bread at La Haye Sainte. Ah," she continued, clasping her hands innocently, "at this time o' night he will be unharnessing Herminius (that is our market-dog) and bringing in the white flour and the brown flour and the little parcel of salt."

So poignant was the recollection, that the maid was compelled to put her hands to her eyes and begin to sob.

"Weep not," said Black Peter, coming down and putting one hand on her shoulder, and with the other drawing gently her fingers from her face, "I will be as your brother. Deign but to step within my castle, and I will send a servant for the jar of wine. You shall only bide with me a matter of ten short minutes, sufficient to tell me of the good brother and of Herminius, your market-dog."

The pretty country girl let her eyes slowly rise to his face, and again the bewitching innocence of the appeal sent Peter's hand complacently to his beard. He stroked it as he regarded her.

"This is what it is to have a way with women. It hath been like this all my life," he confided to himself, with a sigh.

"Then I will come with you," she said suddenly, "and that gladly, for you are wonderfully like my brother John. His beard also is handsome and of the fine tissue. It is the very model of yours."

Peter led the way up the steps.

Then he inquired from his new acquaintance the name of the wine-shop and the brand of the wine.

He put his hand to his side and rattled a little steel alarm shaped like a triangle. In a trice a young beardless youth appeared, all whose body incessantly wriggled and squirmed, like a puppy's which fears the rod or desires the milk-pail.

"Here, restless one!" cried Black Peter Hals, "go swiftly to the inn of the Gouda Cheese, and bring from thence a jar of the wine of Hochheim. And hark ye, also a couple of bottles of Hollands of the best brands. Here is money for thee to pay for all."

He went to the door with the wriggler.

"Now, do you understand?" he said, in a loud tone. And then, under his breath, he added, "Come not too soon back. An you so much as show your ugly face here for an hour and a half, with the buckle of a belly-band I will thrash the soul out of your miserable, whimpering body."

"I would as lief stop by the fire and watch," said the object, casting a sheep's glance at the country-maid, who stood warming her toes, one pretty foot held up to the blaze; "if, perchance, it might be Mynheer Peter's desire to refresh himself at the Sign of the Gouda Cheese for an hour, as is his custom of a night."

"Out with thee, wastrel!" cried Peter angrily, kicking him down the steps; "and mind, come not back for an hour on the peril of your life, and the flaying off of thy skin in handbreadths."

So saying, Peter went back into the wide stone hall. He found his dainty new friend sweeping up the fireplace and setting the sticks for kindling in order at the back.

"We always do it so in our village," she said simply, "but the men in cities and in great castles like this have, of course, no time for such trifles."

"What is your name, pretty maiden?" asked Peter, standing up beside her as she knelt and swept vigorously, raising a rare dust—and, to any eyes but those of a man, doing the work most awkwardly.

"I am called 'the Little Marie,'" said the girl demurely, "but, of course, among those who are not my friends I am called by another name."

"Then I will call you 'the Little Marie'!" said Black Peter, in high delight, "and never so much as ask that other name, which is but for strangers."

He went to a cupboard in the wall which was labelled in large letters, "Holy Bibles and Catechisms for the Use of the Prisoners." The gaoler opened this most respectable and necessary receptacle, and took from it a square black bottle, short-necked and square-shouldered, a few hard biscuits such as seamen use, and two large, wide-mouthed glasses of twisted Venetian glass.

He came back with all these in his arms, and set them down together on the table. "Now," he said, coaxingly, "sit you down, Little Marie, and I will bring some water from the pitcher behind the door there. A glass of fine Hollands will keep out the chills of this night, for the wind is both shrewd and snell."

"Let me bring the water!" cried the Little Marie gaily, clapping her hands ingenuously. "This is just like keeping house to John, my brother. Did I tell you his beard was like yours? See, I will stroke it. Even so does it fall so gracefully on brother John's breast!"

And as she tripped away with the tall jug in her hand to the pail behind the door, the gaoler devoutly hoped that it would be much more than an hour and a half before his deputy should return.

The Little Marie was a long time in finding the

proper water-pail, and it was not till Peter was half across the floor on his way to assist her, that she appeared, carrying the beaker of water in one hand, and a small earthenware cup in the other.

"A big, big jug for the mickle great cat,
And a little wee jug for the kitten,"

So she chanted, to the tune of a Flanders nursery rhyme. Then she laughed merrily. And the amorous Black Peter, subdued to the soles of his boots, vowed that he had never heard anything half so prettily witty in all his life.

Then the Little Marie poured out a full tumbler of the Hollands and water from the jug which she had brought for him, and also adjusted a tiny portion for herself.

"Milk for the kitten," she said; "taste it," and she offered to feed him with a spoonful—"nice, nice—is it not, brother John?"

And brother John smiled and tasted.

"Now drink, great black cat!" she commanded, stamping her foot. And, nothing loath, Peter drank her health—once, twice, and thrice. He would have come about the table to mix another, and, mayhap, to take the Little Marie by the waist. But even as he rose he began to see a flock of Little Maries, and he put his hand hard on the oaken settle.

"I think I will sit down," he said; "drink thou to my health, Little Marie!" And with his eyes drooping with leaden sleep, Peter watched a regiment of country girls drinking his health out of tall green glasses with twisted stems. The last words his ears caught, ere the drowsy, lisping ocean of infinite sleep swelled up and drowned everything, were, "Kitten's milk, brother John—only nice sweet milk for pretty innocent kittens."

And then Black Peter's chin sank on his breast.

. . . . . .

So soon as the gaoler's head fell and his eyes finally closed, an instantaneous change passed over the face of the Little Marie. The wayward mirth and provocation died out of it. A haggard, anxious expression came into her eyes. She ran forward and grasped the bundle of keys that swung at Peter's girdle. She tried with all her might to pull them away, but they were locked to a strong steel band which passed about his waist.

The girl stood a moment in despair. Then she thrust a quick hand into all his pockets, and pulled out many trifles such as men carry—love-tokens, buttons, coins, and the like, mixed with ends of string and stray scraps of tobacco.

These she flung down instantly. She was at her wit's end. But suddenly she saw peeping out from under the beard which had reminded her of brother John's, a tiny bit of yellow chain. She ran her hand along it, and out of Black Peter's bosom there leaped a key.

Without the loss of a moment, Marie fitted it into the padlock which secured the great bunch to his waistband of steel. In another instant they were in her possession. Then, opening the door on the left which had been left unlocked when she brought the water-pitcher, she sped down the passage in the direction of the round tower, in which she knew Wat to be confined.

But when she thought that she must be approaching the place, she found a number of cell-doors. Marie felt that it would not do to make any mistake. Once more her quick wits aided her, as they had already done that night to some purpose.

"Visiting rounds!" she cried, in a hoarse voice, as she had heard the guard do at the posts; "the name of the prisoner detained within?"

But she had tried quite a dozen before she heard the welcome sound of Wat Gordon's voice, speaking from the pallet on which he had been lying thinking of Kate, weary and sleepless.

Swiftly she tried key after key. The fourth grated in the lock and stuck. But the Little Marie thrust the stem of a larger key through the handle, and, setting her knee to the panel and putting all her strength into her hands, she turned the wards of the lock. The door swung to the wall of its own accord, and there lay Wat on his bed.

He leaped to his feet with a startled exclamation when he saw her.

"Marie!" he cried, "what do you here?"

"Hush!" she said, "I am here to save you. Come!"

And carefully locking the door of the cell behind them, they stole along the passage. Black Peter still slept in the outer hall, nodding and swaying stertorously on the settle, and there was no other sound save the breathing of the resting prisoners. Without, the street was still, Peter's lieutenant being busy carrying out his instructions at the excellent Hostel of the Cheese of Gouda.

Marie opened the huge bolted door, closed and locked it, threw the key into the canal, and the pair glided silently and unmolested down the street.

"Have you anywhere to go where you will be safe?" asked Marie.

"Nowhere," said Wat. "I should indeed like to find my comrade John Scarlett, but if he be not in his lodgings, I dare not go to the camp to seek him."

"Come with me," said Little Marie. "I will hide you safe and bring your friend to you. For I also am your friend, though you think it not—and, indeed, care not even if you did believe it."

"But indeed, and in God's truth, I do count you my friend," said Wat; "for who but you, Little Marie, during all these black days, has so much as thought upon poor Wat Gordon?"

At his kind words Marie bent her head, and for the first time in her life her heart was filled with the fresh spring water of purest pleasure. And what wonder it a little of it overflowed into her eyes?

CHAPTER XVII

JACK SCARLETT CALLS HIMSELF A FOOL

WAT and his companion passed along the deserted streets of Amersfort, keeping carefully to those which were darkest and least frequented. For a space neither spoke. But as they were crossing a wide deserted square, the Little Marie broke the silence with a startling speech.

"I think by this time he will be dead," she said simply, as though she had said that it rained.

"Think *who* will be dead?" queried Wat, stopping instantly and facing her.

"Why, your enemy!" replied the Little Marie calmly; "but let us go on lest the watch should come by and stop us."

"My enemy!" exclaimed Walter, putting his hand to his brow like one bewildered.

"Aye," said Marie, "the man you showed me and told me was your enemy—the dark man called Barra, the Provost-Marshal. I, the Little Marie, struck him in the side with a knife as he was mounting his horse to ride away—methinks I know whither. At any rate, it was on an evil quest. He rides on no others. Did I not tell you that he was my enemy before he was yours?"

"Struck my Lord Barra—with a knife, Marie?" stammered Wat. His slow northern blood had not dreamed of such swift vengeance.

"Aye," said the girl anxiously; "did I not do right? He was mine enemy, true. He it was who first brought me hither, left me friendless in this city of Satan, made me that which men think me. But had that been all his fault he might have lived. After all, that sin was mine as well as his. I struck him because he was your enemy, and because you hated him. Did I not well?"

"Marie," said Wat very soberly, "you and I are as good as dead for this. Did any see you strike?"

"Aye, marry there were," she replied carelessly; "but I was well wrapped about in a red cloak and wore the cap and ear-plates of a peasant woman of Frisia. There were several that stood curiously about, as I went near to hand him my petition at his own door. But what with the night, the reeling of the torches, and the instant confusion, none put out a hand to stay me as I went away. And I think he will surely be dead by this!"

She spoke the words dispassionately, like one who has done an unpleasing duty and has no further concern nor stake in the matter.

Instinctively their feet had turned into the Street of Zaandpoort. Wat's heart suddenly leaped within him. He had come to see the house where he had been happy for a few hours. He would look just once upon the window whence his love had often looked forth, and at that other, within which her dear head would even now be lying, shedding soft dishevelled curls distractingly over the pillow—ah! the heart-sickness! To think that never should he see it thus, never now lay his own close beside it, as in wild visions of the night he had often dreamed of doing.

But there shone a light from the living-room of Will Gordon's lodging. Shadows moved restlessly

across the blind. The house in Zaandpoort Street was still awake and stirring.

Wat took a sudden resolution. He would risk all, and for the last time look upon the woman he adored, even though he knew she loved him not.

"Hide here a moment, Marie." Wat said to his companion; "over there in the dark of the archway. This is the house of my cousin, a soldier from my own country of Scotland. I would bid him farewell before I go."

The young girl looked wistfully at him, and laid her hand quickly on her heart.

"Ah, it is the house of your love—I know it," she said, sadly and reproachfully; "and you have said so often that none loved you—that none cared for you."

Wat smiled the pale ghost of a smile, unseen in the darkness of the night.

"It is true that once on a time I loved one dwelling in this house. But she loved me not ——"

"It is impossible," moaned Marie. "I know that she must have loved you ——"

"No, she loved me not," answered Wat; "but, as I think, she loved the man whom you ——"

Wat stepped back into shadow, and Marie clutched his cloak with a nervous hand. It was Will Gordon who came down the stairs. Haggard, unshaven, looking straight before him with set eyes, he was not the same man who had come so cosily back from the guardroom of the palace the night before with his wife upon his arm.

Wat advanced a pace out of the dark of the arch. He held out his hand.

"Will," he said, "with you I quarrelled not. And I think that if your wife, who used to be so staunchly my friend, knew my broken heart, she, too, would for-

give my hasty words, and be ready to understand evil appearances that were no more than appearances."

But Will Gordon did not take the outstretched hand, which Wat held a moment in the air and then dropped sadly to his side.

"Tell me first," he said, "where you have hidden our Kate, and what you have to do with the killing of my Lord of Barra? After that I will either take your hand or set my sword in your heart."

"Will Gordon!" cried Wat, starting back, "was it for this that we two kept Wellwood's men at bay under the arch at Holyrood? For this that we lay shoulder to shoulder on the chill moors, that in these latter days you should charge me with crimes of which I know nothing? Hidden Kate? Why, is not Kate here, behind the glass of that window? Does she not sleep soundly, recking nothing of evil or the sorrow of others, upon her bed? Is not her maiden heart as ever free and careless ——"

"Wat, I believe you, lad," said Will; "it was a hasty and ill-conceived thought of mine. I know you love us all over much to bring harm to our lassie. But certainly Kate is lost—has been carried off—and now they are seeking her everywhere, charging her, forsooth, with the slaying of my Lord Barra."

At the last words Wat laughed a little scornful laugh.

He had not yet taken in the terrible import of the news concerning Kate's loss. But it seemed a foolishly monstrous thing that even in jest she should be charged with the death of Barra, while not ten yards behind him, in the dark of the arched doorway, stood the Little Marie, with her dagger scarcely dry in her garter.

Then after a moment Will's first words suddenly

came back to him, as if they had been echoed from the tall buildings which stood about them.

"You do not mean it—Kate gone!" he said dully, and without comprehension; "it is impossible. Who so wicked in all this land as to have done the thing?"

Then Will told him all the tale of the false message and of their home-coming.

"It is Barra's trick—what other," Wat said at once; "I saw that he loved her—if such a poisonous reptile can love. But I thought not that even he could devise her wrong, else had I slain him on the spot."

Wat meditated a little while in silence. "Did Kate tell you if he had spoken aught to her of love?"

"He offered her the most honourable marriage, and yet greater things when the Prince should come to his own. But she would have none of him," replied Will Gordon.

"It is enough," cried Wat. "Certainly this is an affair of my Lord's. Dead or alive, I will trace out his plots till I find his trail. It may be after all but a matter of Haxo the Bull, his Calf, and his Killer. Give me no more than a sword and pistols, and my belt with the gold that is in your strong-box."

"Will you not come up with me, Wat?" said Will Gordon. "Come, cousin."

"Nay," said Wat, "there is not time. It is but now that I have escaped from their prison. In an hour there will be the hue and cry, and then they will surely search your house. I must be far on the sea-road by daybreak. Only furnish me with necessities, cousin mine, and let me go. My humblest service to your wife—but tell her not till after I am gone!"

Will Gordon went back up the stairs. Presently he was down again with the weapons, with enough and to spare of ammunition, a loaf of wheaten bread,

a flask of wine, and the broad leathern belt with the gold pieces, which slipped down like a weighty serpent as he laid it in Wat's hands. The money had been kept sacred for just such an emergency.

The cousins bade one another a kindly adieu in the fashion of other and happier times, and then Will Gordon returned sadly to his wife.

Wat stepped back to the shelter where he had left Marie, but she was not to be seen. He looked every way and called softly; but the girl had vanished.

"It is perhaps as well!" he said, the Scots prudence within him warring with his gratitude toward the girl who had twice risked her life for him without thought of reward.

He took his way alone across the broad squares and over the canals to Jack Scarlett's lodgings. There was a light in the window as he approached. He knocked gently, and a gruff voice ordered him to come in, or else (as an equally satisfactory alternative) to proceed incontinent to quite other regions.

Wat entered, and there, seated upon the side of his bed, he found Scarlett with one boot off and the other still upon his foot. His eyes were set in his head, and a kindly idiotic smile was frozen on his face.

At the sight of Wat, pale as death, with his clothes frayed and disarranged with his long sojourn in prison, Scarlett started up. With a vigorous wave of his hand he motioned his visitor away.

"Avaunt! as the clerks say. Get away briskly, or I will say the Lord's Prayer at thee (that's if I can remember it). Come not near a living man. Wat Gordon in the flesh with a long sword was bad enough; but Wat Gordon dead, with an unshaven chin and clothed out of a rag-shop, is a thousand times worse. Alas, that it should come so soon to

this! I am shamed to be such a shaveling in my cups! Yet of a truth I drank only seven bottles and a part of an eighth. This comes of being a poor orphan, and being compelled to drink the most evil liquor of this unfriendly country!"

"Scarlett," said Wat seriously, "listen to me. I am going on a long quest. Will you come with me? I need a companion now as a man never needed comrade before! Mine enemy has stolen my love, and I go to find her!"

"Away—get away!" cried Scarlett. "I want not to die yet a while. I desire time to repent—that is, when I grow old enough to repent. There is Sergeant Hilliard over there at the end of the passage," he went on eagerly, as if a famous idea had struck him, "his hair is grey, if you like, and he has a most confounded gout. He will gladly accompany you. Be advised, kind ghost. Have the goodness to cross the stairway to Hilliard. Remember I was ever thy friend in life, Wat Gordon!"

"Beshrew your tipsy, idiot soul," thundered Wat, rising in a towering passion; "have you drunk so much that you know not a living man from one dead and damned? I will teach thee the difference, and that sharply."

And with that he went over to the bedside, and banged Scarlett's head soundly against the rafters of the garret, exclaiming at every thump and crash, "I pray you, Jack Scarlett, say when you are convinced that Wat Gordon is flesh and blood, and not an airy ghost."

It did not take much of this most potent logic to persuade the ghost-seer that he had to do with Wat Gordon in his own proper and extremely able-bodied person.

"Enough!" he cried; "hold your hands, Wat. Could you not have said as much at first, and not stood gaping there like a week-old corpse done up in a winding-sheet?"

"Thou donnert ass," cried Wat, "will you come with me on my quest, or will you bide on here in Amersfort among putty-souled huxters, teaching shambling recruits how to stand upon their legs?"

"Of a truth, Buchan's knaves are indeed most hopeless. Yet whither can I go? I know not of a better service," said Scarlett, shaking his head doubtfully.

"But the adventure, man," cried Wat; "think of the adventure over seas, through continents, upon far islands, all in quest of a true lass that hath been trapped by devils, and may be treated most uncivilly. It makes me mad!"

"All these are most extremely well for you, Wat Gordon of Lochinvar. You are a younger man, and these bones of mine like well to lie on a soft bed at my age. Also and chiefly the lass is your lass, and not mine. Were you to find her to-morrow, what should I get out of all the errant jackassery in the world?"

"John Scarlett," cried Wat, nodding his head solemnly, "thy heart is grown no better than a chunk of fat lard. There is no spirit in thee any more. Go, turn over on thy side and snore, till it be time to go forth once more to drill thy rotten sheep's regiment. God kens, 'tis all you are good for now, to be bell-weather to such a shuffling, clod-hopping crew. 'Keep your head up! Fall not over your musket! Prod up that man in the rear! I pray you do not hold your gun as if it were a dandling baby! March!' Pshaw! John Scarlett, is that the life for a man or for a puddle-rolling pig of the stye?"

Scarlett appeared to consider. He looked at the nails in the sole of his boot with an air of grave deliberation, as if they could help him to a decision.

"'Tis true, in truth most truly true," he said, "it is a dog's life. But, after all, there is ever the chance of war."

"War? And will not I give thee wars to fill thy belly, and leave something over for stuffing to thy calves?" cried Wat. "Why, man, thy sword will never be in its sheath—fighting, seeking, spying, we will overpass land and sea, hiding by heather and hill, creeping down by the bonny burnside to win our speckled breakfasts out of the pools ——"

"Tush, man," answered Scarlett pettishly, "for all you know, your Kate may be shut up in the next street. And besides, as I said, after all she is your lass, not mine."

Wat stepped back with a fine gesture of renunciation.

"Well," he said, "has it come to this? Never did I think to see the day when Jack Scarlett—old Jack Scarlett of the wrist-of-steel—would turn sheep and be afraid to set his shoulder to Wat Gordon's, or even to cross blades with him, as he did the other night in the Inn of Brederode. But old Jack has become no better than a gross, rotten, grease-lined crock, and—Lord, Lord, such a flock as he leads on parade after him!"

"S'blood! I will e'en break thy head, Wat, an you cease not thy cackle. Now I will come with thee just to prove I am no sheep. No, nor craven either. But only the greatest and completest old fool that ever held a commission from a brave Prince and one of the few good paymasters in Europe."

With this Jack Scarlett rose, and did upon him his

cloak and all his fighting-gear with an air grave and sullen, as though he were going to his own beheading. Then he searched all his drawers and pockets for money—which, in spite of the vaunted excellence of the paymaster's department, appeared to be somewhat scarce with the master-at-arms. Presently he announced himself as ready.

His decision took this shape:

"This is the excellentest fool's errand in the world, and I the greater fool to go with another fool upon it. Lead on, Wat Gordon."

So, grumbling and muttering, he followed Wat down the stairs.

"And now," said Scarlett, "pray have you so much as thought upon our need of horses?"

"Nay," said Wat, "I have thought of naught but getting out of prison, finding a friend, and winning back my lass."

"Aye, marry," grunted Scarlett, "thy lass! Mickle hast thou thought of taking thy fool comrade away from the best pay-roll and the most complaisant landlady he has found these thirty years."

CHAPTER XVIII

A PERILOUS MEETING

At the corner of the square, as they were turning under the shadow of the cathedral, a smallish, slender youth came running tripplingly towards them.

"You want horses," he said to Wat; "there are three of them ready waiting over there in the dark of the trees beyond the canal yonder."

"And who are you, my skip-jack manling?" said Scarlett, "that makes so free with your horses in this country of donkeys?"

"A friend!" said the boy, sliding away from the rasp in the voice of the master-at-arms.

Something familiar in gait and manner struck Wat through the disguise of the unfamiliar dress.

"It is the Little Marie!" he said, gladly enough. "What do you here in this attire?"

The slim figure had slipped round to Wat's side and now laid a soft, small hand on his.

"I have come to help you to escape. I have three horses waiting for you, and I have discovered that the pass-word for the night is 'Guelderland.'"

"And the horses," queried Wat, "whence came they?"

"Ne'er inquire too carefully so that they be good ones," quoth Scarlett the campaigner.

"I took the loan of them from the stables of the Inn of the Coronation. I know of one who will see them safe home," said Marie.

"Is their hire paid for?" asked Wat the Scot.

"Faith, aye," said Jack Scarlett; "I myself have paid the fat old villain Sheffell for them over and over again. Let us go on. It skills not to be too nice in distinctions when one argues under the shadow of the gallows. The rascal shall have his horses back safe enough when we are done with them."

They went by unfrequented ways, following their slim, alert guide down byways that echoed under their feet, by quiet, evil-smelling streets vocal with night-raking cats, past innumerable prowling dogs with their backs chronically arched at the shoulders, half in general defiance of their kind, and half with bending over baskets of domestic rubbish.

They came after a while to the shade of the little wood beyond the great canal; and there, sure enough, tied to the green-sparred wooden box, which in Dutch fashion had been put round some of the trees of rarer sort, were three horses, all busily employed trying to crop the herbage to the limit of their several tethers.

"And the third?" queried Scarlett, looking at them. "Whose leg goes across the saddle of the third?"

"I come with you," said Marie, hastily and anxiously; "believe me, I can guide you to a little haven where are ships wherein you may reach your own land—or, at least, if it please you, escape safely out of this country of enemies."

"And who may you be, my pretty little young man, with the babe's face, and where gat you the spirit that makes you speak so brisk and bold?"

Marie looked at Wat through the dim light as though to beseech him to answer for her.

Said Wat, overcoming a natural touch of shyness and reluctance, "This is the friend of mine who got me out of prison, and who was kind to me beyond all

thanks when I abode therein. She is only 'the Little Marie,' whom you remember at the Hostel of the Coronation. After that night she went back there no more."

"She!" cried Scarlett; "*she*, did he say? 'Only the Little Marie,' quotha! Well, that is a good deal for a Scot of the Covenant, one that for lack of other helpers will have to company with the Hill-wanderers, so far as I can see, when he goes back to his own land."

"Aye," said Wat dryly, "but we are not back yet."

"I kenned," returned Scarlett, every whit as dryly, "that we were on one love-quest. But had I kenned that we were on two of them at once, the devil a foot would I have stirred out of my good lodgings, or away from the bield of that excellent and truly buxom householder, the Frau Axel."

So far they had spoken in Scots, but the Little Marie, listening with tremulous eagerness to the tone of their conversation, laid her hand wistfully on Scarlett's arm.

"Fear not," she said in French, "I will never be a burden to you, nor yet troublesome. I am to stay with you only till you are clear of your difficulties. I can help you even as I helped him, for I know whither the maiden you seek has been taken. And when you are on the track of the robbers, then, so quickly as may be, the Little Marie will return to her own place."

Scarlett did not give back a single word of good or bad. As his manner was, he only grunted abruptly—yet, as it had been, not ill-pleased.

"Time we were in the saddle, at all events," he said, "that is, if we are to pass the posts ere the coming of the day."

Presently, therefore, the three found themselves riding towards the city gate. Scarlett rode first to show his uniform—that of the new corps of which he was master-at-arms. He wore also the ribbon of the order he had received from the Prince conspicuously displayed, if it so happened that the watch should shed the light of a lantern upon them.

"Halt!" duly cried the sentinel at the port of the camp. "Who goes there?"

"The nephew of the Colonel, my Lord Buchan," said Scarlett, "going to the camp under escort and accompanied by his tutor."

"Advance and give the pass-word," said the sentry mechanically.

"Guelderland!" said Scarlett, as carelessly as though he had been passing posts all night and was tired of the formula.

The sentry, dreaming of a maid with plates of gold at her temples, among the far-away canals of Friesland, fell back and permitted the three horsemen to pass without so much as wasting a glance upon them. The gates closed behind and the white tents glimmered vaguely in front of them. They turned aside, however, from the camp, keeping cautiously along to the right as they rode, in order to skirt the wall of the city. In this way they hoped to reach the open country without being again accosted; for it was entirely within the range of possibility that the pass-word which had served them so well inside the city might be worse than useless without the walls of Amersfort.

Nevertheless, they passed the last of the white tents without challenge.

As soon as the camp was left behind Marie came to the front, and, without apology or explanation,

led the way, diving into darkling roads and striking across fields by unseen bridle-paths without the least hesitation.

Meanwhile Wat and Scarlett, riding close behind her, talked over their plans. Kate (they decided) was in the power of Barra. She had been carried off against her will. So much they were sure of. Barra, however, was clearly not with her, having been wounded at the moment of his setting out by the knife of the Little Marie. Therefore, for the time being at least, Kate was saved the greater dangers of his presence. Also, his men would certainly keep her safe enough. The only question was in what direction Kate had been carried off.

"I can help you with that also," said the girl, to whom their quest had been explained, letting her horse drop back beside Wat's, "for yester-even there came a certain well-refreshed sailor-man of my village to the street of the prison. He served, he said, in a ship called the *Sea Unicorn*, and she waited only the signal of my Lord Barra to weigh her anchor. 'Goes my lord to Scotland?' I asked him. 'Nay,' he laughed, 'at least not directly and not alone. But he brings a fair wench for company to him, and that without asking her leave, as the Lords of Barra do all. Captain Smith is well paid for the venture, and to every man of us there is good white drink-money.' So after I heard that I was determined to set my knife deeper in my lord for the poor lass's sake, that she might never taste his tender mercies as I myself had done."

"And heard you whither the ship was to sail, Marie?" asked Wat, listening with great attention to her tale.

"Nay, my captain," she replied; "of that the man

knew little, save where she was to put down her anchors and wait, which was off the town of Lis-op-Zee, to which presently we ride. But Captain Smith had sworn to go first to his home at Poole, whatever might be his freight. And the sailor believed that he would keep his word."

"That suits Jack Scarlett excellently," said his companion; "for to go on a quest after runaway maids to the kingdom of the blessed Louis the Great is of a certainty to have my neck stretched, on account of the somewhat hasty manner in which I relinquished the service of his Most Christian Majesty. And Scotland, though mine own land, has overly many waspish sectaries and rough-riding malignants for old Jack to be wholly comfortable therein."

"Then England and Poole it shall be," said Wat confidently. "You shall see!"

"But have you considered, my friend, that England is a somewhat large mark to hit in the white and bring up in Poole Harbour at the first offer?" said Scarlett. "How shall one know that he is within a hundred miles or more of his aim?"

"Hearken," said Wat. "'Tis usually Jack Scarlett that is ready with plans, eager and fretful with encouragements. Upon his own adventures he fairly sweats alternatives, but on this occasion of mine he does naught but grumble. There is yet time for him to turn about and betake him to his greasy sheep-fold. 'Guelderland' will even yet admit him in time for the morning muster of the fleecy ones."

Scarlett laughed good-naturedly, like one who will not take offence even when offence is meant.

"I am not in love, you see," he said. "It is love that is fertile of stratagems. I am but an old, wizened apple-jack. But so was it not ever. The days have

been—ah, lad, the days have been!—when Jack Scarlett did not ride hot-foot after another man's lass."

"Hear my idea," said Wat, paying little heed to him. "We may hit or miss, it is true, but in any case the ship would be a small one, and most likely she would run for the nearest point of safety. Yet not directly across, for all the narrow seas are patrolled by the English vessels, because deadly jealousy of the Dutch still rankles deep in the heart of the King, for the defeats he had of them in the days when he was Lord High Admiral of the Fleet, and attended to his mistresses' lap-dogs instead of his duty."

Scarlett moved uneasily. There was, he knew, in most countries such a thing as a navy, but ships and rolling Jack Tars little concerned a soldier, save to transport him to his campaigning ground.

It was brightening to the morning as they came in sight of the high dunes of land that shut off the Northern Sea. Behind them, with the gables of its houses already threatened by the encroaching waves of sand, nestled the little village of Lis-op-Zee. A few fishing-boats were drawn up into a swallow's nest of a harbour, and beyond league on league stretched the desolate dunes, through which the river Lis felt its tortuous way among the sand-hollows to the wider levels of the sea.

Wat and Scarlett with their attendant were about to ride directly and without challenge through the street of the village towards the harbour, when a man came staggering out of a narrow entry betwixt two of the taller houses, so suddenly that the horse of the Little Marie almost knocked him down.

It was already the grey light of dawn, and the man, who was clad in swash-buckler array of side-

breeches and broad hat, with many swords and pistols a-dangle at his belt, set his hand on his breast tragically and cried, "I thank the saints of the blessed Protestant religion that I have escaped this danger. For if I had been run over by that thing upon the horse there, before the Lord I should never have known what had struck me!"

"Get out of the way!" thundered Scarlett savagely, for he was in no mood for miscellaneous fooling; "lie down under a bush, man, and learn to take thy liquor quietly."

The man turned instantly with a new swagger in his attitude, and a straightening of his shoulders to a sort of tipsy attention. "And who, Sir Broad-Stripe, made you Burgomeister of the town of Lis-op-Zee? Or may you by chance be His Highness the Prince in person, or his High Councillor my Lord Barra, that you would drive good honest gentlemen before you like cattle on the streets of this town?"

"Out, fellow!" shouted Scarlett furiously, drawing his sword; "leave me to settle with him," he added over his shoulder. Wat and Marie rode by at the side, but the man still stood and barred Scarlett's path.

Now Jack Scarlett was not exactly, as we have reason to know, a man patient to a fault. So on this occasion he spurred his horse straight at his opponent and spread him instantly abroad in the dust, sprawling flat upon his back on the highway.

"Help! Hallo, Barra's men! Here is a comrade ill-beset!" cried the rascal, without, however, attempting to rise.

And out of the houses on either side there came running a little cloud of men, all armed with swords and pistols hastily snatched, and with their garments in various stages of disarray.

Wat gave one look behind and then turned to his companion, holding his head down the while that the pursuers might not recognise him.

"Come on, thou fool, Scarlett," he cried, "we have started Barra's whole nest of wasps—there come Haxo and the rest. God help us if they have seen us."

Scarlett turned also. But it was too late—the mischief was done.

"Stop them!" came the thunderous bellow of Haxo the Bull. "These are the fellows who outflouted and overbore us at the Inn of the Coronation."

So without waiting to parley, Wat and Scarlett, with the Little Marie well abreast of them, set spurs to their horses and rode as hard as they could gallop through the fringing woods of Lis and the sweet and flowery May glades out upon the desolate sand-hills of Noorwyk, hoping to hit upon some dell or cleft among these vast waves of sand, where they might keep themselves safe till their enemies should tire of the search and return to the city.

CHAPTER XIX

THE BATTLE ON THE DUNES

HAXO and his forces were not in a condition to follow too closely after the three. The chance medley for which they had pined was come, and that without their seeking. The rascals had gone out to do one part of their master's will. The shipping of a lass over-seas was no doubt a pretty piece of work enough, and would be well paid for; but the slaying of Wat Gordon and Jack Scarlett, their ancient adversaries of the Hostel of the Coronation, was a job ten times more to the fit of their stomachs.

Thus it was with Haxo and his immediate followers.

But the fatigues of the evening and the good liquor of Lis-op-Zee had rendered most of the chief butcher's men somewhat loath to leave their various haunts and hiding-places. Moreover, their horses were stabled here and there throughout the village, so that Wat and his companions had a good start of a quarter of an hour ere Haxo, furious and foaming with anger at the delay, and burning with the desire for revenge, could finally start in pursuit with his entire company.

It was now a dewy morning, a morning without clouds, and the sparse, benty grass on the sand-hills was still spangled with diamond points innumerable. The sun rose over the woods through which they had

Wat. "They can storm the wall at half a dozen points."

"True," said Scarlett, "most true—yet for all that, here at least we cannot be shot at from a distance as we sit helpless on the sand, like rabbits that come hotching out of a wood at eventide to feed on the green. We are not overlooked. We have a spring of water—which is not an over-common thing on these dunes and so near the sea. I tell you the Beggars knew what they were about when they planted their watch-tower down in such a spot."

In this manner Scarlett, the grumbler of the night, heartened his companions as soon as ever it came nigh the grips of fighting.

Then the men took out the shovels and the other tools, and set about putting the defences in some order, replacing the stones which had fallen down, and clearing out little embrasures, where one might lie tentily with a musket and take aim from shelter. While Wat and Scarlett were busy with these works of fortification, the Little Marie ran down into the dells again, looking wondrously feat and dainty in her boy's costume.

Scarlett, the old soldier, glanced more than once approvingly after her.

"'Tis just as well that the lady-love has not yet been found—or I should not envy you the explanation you would assuredly be called upon to make," said he, smiling over to Wat as he built and strengthened his defences.

Instinctively Wat squared himself, as though his mattock had been a sword and he saluting his general.

"Ye ken me little, John Scarlett," he replied, "if you know not that I would not touch the lass for harm with so much as the tip of my little finger."

"Doubtless, doubtless," said Scarlett drily, "yet it would astonish me mightily if even that would satisfy your Mistress Kate of the Lashes—aye, or in troth if such extreme continence greatly pleasures the lass herself!"

To this Wat disdained any answer, but went on piling the sand and setting the square stones in order.

Presently the Little Marie came running very fast along the bottom of the dells, which hereabouts wimpled mazily in and out with nooks and cunning passages everywhere, so that they constituted the excellentest places in the world for playing hide-and-seek. Taking both her hands, which she stretched up to him, Wat pulled the girl lightly over the new defences, and when she was a little recovered from her race, she told them that the enemy could be seen scouting by two and threes along the edge of the forest, and even venturing a little way towards them into the sandy waste of the dunes. But they had not as yet found the horses, nor begun to explore the sandy hollows where an ambush might lie hidden behind every ridge.

"It is Haxo the Bull who leads them," she said, "for the others are none so keen on the work. But he goes among them vaunting and prating of the brave rewards which his master will give, and how the State also will pay largely for the capture of the traitor and prison-breaker."

"How near by did you see him?" asked Wat.

"He was within twenty paces of me as I lay behind a bush of broom," she said, "and had it not been for the men who were with him, and the fear that they might have marked me down as I ran, I had given him as good as I gave his master."

And with the utmost calmness the Little Marie

unslung the dags or horse-pistols from her side, and took out the long, keen dagger with which she had wounded Barra as he mounted at his own door to ride after his prisoner.

So, perched on this shadeless shelter they waited hour after hour, while the sun beat pitilessly down on them. The heat grew sullenly oppressive. A dizzy, glimmering haze quivered over the sandhills, and made it difficult to see clearly more than a few hundred yards in any direction.

Wat and Scarlett desired the girl to rest a while under the shadow of the rude hut in the corner.

"But then I could not watch for the coming of your enemies, my captain," she said, as if that settled the matter.

And when Wat repeated his request, Marie looked so unhappy that they had perforce to allow her to stand on guard equally with themselves.

And indeed, as it proved, it was the Little Marie whose sharp eyes first saw their opponents tracking stealthily along the sandy bottoms between them and the forest. The pursuers seemed to be ten or twelve in number, and they came scouting cautiously here and there through the hollows, running briskly to the tops of the higher dunes, and looking eagerly all about them for the footprints of men or horses in the looser sand.

Before Scarlett or Wat could stop her—indeed, before either of them so much as suspected her intention, the Little Marie had climbed over the wall on the side farthest from the enemy, but nearest to the sea. In a moment she had run deftly down among the ruts and hiding-places of the dells. With wonderful skill she threaded her way towards the approaching miscreants, without letting them catch

a single glimpse of her. Indeed, even from their watch-tower on the top of the dune, it was as much as Wat and Scarlett could do to keep her in sight through the wavering glimmer of the heated air.

Presently, as they lay behind their defences, each in his own rude shelter, Wat and Scarlett could see her crouch low in a little cup-like depression upon the height of a dune overlooking the track by which the enemy must come. The girl lay motionless, with her body flat to the ground, like a cat which makes ready for the pounce; and they could see the sun of the afternoon wink on the steel barrels of her pistols as on dewy holly leaves.

Soon the vanguard of Haxo's little army came scouting and scenting along. The men kept signalling and crying, keeping touch with one another and making believe to search the wilderness of sand and bent with marvellous exactitude and care.

The foremost of them had just passed the hillock on the top of which Marie lay when "Crack! crack!" a couple of pistol-shots rang out loudly on the slumberous air. One man pitched heavily forward on his face, while another and younger man spun round like a rabbit, bent himself double, clawed convulsively at the sand and then slowly collapsed across the path.

The scattered trackers here and there about the mounds and hollows stood rooted to the ground with vague alarm at the sight. Some of them, indeed, put their heads down and ran up the hill of sand from which the shots had come. But when they reached the summit all they saw was the reek of burned powder lazily dispersing in the hot haze of the afternoon, while upon the dune's extremest edge were the marks of a pair of elbows in the sand, where Marie had reclined as she took aim.

But of their dangerous assailant they found no further trace. For immediately upon firing Marie had snatched her pistols and descended into the winding lane of sand at the back of the dune. Then, being perfectly acquainted with her line of communication, and mindful ever to keep upon the shady side, she glided from shelter to shelter with the silence and skill of one bred to such guerilla warfare.

Haxo and his party were manifestly discouraged by their misfortune, and still more by the immunity of their unseen foe. What had happened once might very well happen again. Nevertheless, trusting to their numbers, they came on with still more infinite pains, Haxo himself climbing a high dune and crying directions to his men how they were to advance by this pass and that dell, in which from his post of vantage he could be certain that no enemy lurked.

CHAPTER XX

CAPTAIN, MY CAPTAIN

MARIE had made good her retreat till she halted within a few hundred yards of the little fort where Wat and Scarlett kept their watch. Here she lay crouched behind a bush of broom which had escaped the general destruction as the shifting sand advanced, and which had made good its position by associating itself with stubborn clumps of pink and sea-holly. For these are both brave, self-helpful plants, and can bind the sand together with their own proper roots, without the aid of bent grass. Behind this ambuscade Marie crouched, and Wat would have descended to her assistance but that Scarlett forcibly withheld him.

"Lie still, man; can ye not bide and watch? It is as bonny as a painted picture. Think you that our muckle clumsy bodies could run and hide as featly? I trow not! Let the lass do her own ways. She has, indeed, a very pretty notion of war—aye, far better than many of our boasted generals, and nigh hand as good as the Prince himself. For, to my thinking, there is more generalship in delaying and harassing the advance of a superior force than in defeating an equal number with trumpets, drums, and all the paraphernalia of war."

So, in obedience to Scarlett, and also because the girl's quick manœuvres at once astonished and fascinated him, Wat abode still where he was. But his

eyes were chained to the slight form of the Little Marie, who lay behind the broom perfectly plain to them from their fortress eminence, but wholly hidden from the line of the enemy's advance. It seemed an unconscionable time before the pursuers came near, because on this occasion they took the utmost precautions to avoid surprise ; and it was not till Haxo himself had ascended the knoll within thirty feet of where the girl lay that the foremost of the approaching skirmishers came within range.

But Marie was either so careless of her life or so sure of the line of her retreat, that she appeared to pick and choose deliberately among her enemies. The persons of many of them were doubtless well known to her, and it is possible that she had private scores to pay off while thus fighting the battles of Wat and Scarlett.

Presently one of her pistols spoke again and a third man fell wounded. Haxo stood up to mark the spot from which the reek of the powder floated lazily into the air ; and as he did so, Marie, wheeling about on her elbows, steadied her weapon on the edge of the sand between the broom bush and the sea-holly. It cracked, and Haxo, with a cry of anger and pain, clapped his hand upon his ankle, for all the world like a boy that runs barefoot and whose toe meets a stone unexpectedly.

But this time it was impossible for Marie to conceal the line of her flight. She had to make a considerable detour to the right ; for, in order to pick her men, she had allowed some of the enemy to pass her by, and these now bent hastily round to intercept her. The rest, following Haxo's frenzied directions as he leaped and swore with the pain of his hurt, pursued with might and main, getting glimpses of her as

she ran. For on this occasion Marie took no care whatever to keep to the bottoms, but on the contrary chose the hardest surface and the most direct road for the shore, as though she had been fleeing to a boat which lay in waiting at the sea edge.

It was soon obvious that this was the idea of the pursuers, for those on the left who had passed her place of ambush exerted themselves to reach the shingle of the beach by the narrow and deep defile in front of the wall of the fort. They paused occasionally to fire, and cheered and shouted all the time in order to encourage one another—which doubtless they were much in need of, for it must have been most discomfortable to see their comrades dropping here and there about them without so much as the pleasure of getting a shot at the assailant.

Then for the first time Wat and Scarlett perceived whither Marie was leading the enemy. Ever as she came nearer she raised her arm and waved them to be ready. But with what they were to be ready did not appear, unless with their pistols, to have a chance at the rascals as they passed under the wall. Yet it was not a place favourable for pistol practice, because at that point the wall was broken down and fully thirty feet of it completely undermined and tottering to its fall.

"The wall, the wall! Push down the wall!" cried Marie, as she came almost underneath it.

It was Scarlett who first grasped her idea. Wat on his part was too much astonished at the daring and address of this girl to be capable of more than a vague, gaping wonderment.

"Quick, Wat!" cried Scarlett; "it must be the overhanging wall she means. See you not that these fellows, being ignorant of our presence, it is a thousand

chances to one that for ease of road and haste to get before the lass to keep her away from the sea, they will take the path through the ravine and pass immediately underneath the wall?"

"And what of that?" asked Wat.

"What of that? Why, man, what is come of your ancient contrivance, your wise shifts, your forethought? How will you ever find your love if your wits are so moidered, before ever ye leave this dull Dutch country?"

"Faith, and I see it not yet," cried Wat, looking over at the chase more bewildered than ever.

"Why, she means that we are to push the wall over upon them when they come, I 'll wager," said Scarlett.

"And so destroy our only defences; it is, indeed, a wise ploy!" cried Wat scornfully.

"Hush, man, and come help. We may annihilate the whole crew at a blow," said the old soldier, who had no petty scruples about ways and means; "an enemy dead is a friend the more, however he come by his end."

Scarlett and Wat stole to the wall and peeped cautiously over. The ill-laid and mouldered stones tottered even as they leaned against them; one or two rattled into the defile as they looked down. The heads of the pursuers were just appearing at the entrance of the dell. One of them was training his piece to shoot it off at the girl, who ran lightly as at a frolic a hundred yards in front.

Without a suspicion of danger the assailants came posting along.

"Now, with all your might!" cried Scarlett, when he saw the villains exactly underneath. He could plainly descry the same four men who had sat about the table in the Hostel of the Coronation, and some

of the others also who had flocked in thither to join the fray.

So without further word Wat and Scarlett set their thews to the wall; and between them, panting with the long chase and grimed with powder, where the touch-hole had spat up in her face, the Little Marie threw herself on the parapet to help on the catastrophe with all her feeble strength.

The wall swayed in a piece and quivered a moment on the verge ere it fell with a prodigious crash upon the straggling file of men in the deep defile below. A hoarse, confused cry was heard, running up as the pursuers too late recognised their danger, into a shriek of agony. Then a thick cloud of dust and sand arose, which prevented those in the redoubt from seeing the effect of their stratagem. Presently from the gap they could see a few limping stragglers disentangle their disabled bodies from the ruins, and make haste to put as much space as possible between themselves and the unseen dangers which beset them on every side on these wide, unwholesome dunes.

The Little Marie stood erect in the breach. She held her pistols in her hand and marked down the survivors as they ran.

"Let them go, Marie," cried Wat; "they are powerless to harm us now!"

Wat's heart was a little turned to pity by the wholesale destruction wrought beneath his eyes by the falling of the wall; but Marie's eyes only glistened the more brightly with excitement and the light of battle.

"But they are *your* enemies, my captain!" said Marie, evidently surprised at his words. Then very coolly she went on loading her pistols.

"Stand down, Marie," cried Wat, "or they will surely do you an injury. I saw a man's head behind yon highest dune."

"I care not so be they kill me outright. I do not want to be only wounded," answered the Little Marie, laughing recklessly. Nevertheless, she began obediently to descend.

Wat's warning came too late. Haxo himself, full of bitterness and foaming with the desire for vengeance, had managed to limp near enough to witness the destruction of his men in the defile. While the girl was priming her pistols, he had taken careful aim. Now he fired.

Marie gave a low quick cry and put her hand to her breast to feel where the wound was. Then she steadied herself and attempted to go on with the preparation of her pistol.

But with a little moan of pain she sank back into Wat's arms, who gently laid her down in the shade of the wall. Scarlett brought her water in the brim of his broad hat. He sprinkled it on her face. A brief examination showed that Haxo's bullet had struck the girl an inch above the left breast. Scarlett and Wat looked squarely at each other. The significance of that single glance was not lost on the Little Marie.

A bright look of manifest joy instantly overspread her face.

"I am glad—very glad," she said, fighting a little with her utterance; "lift me up so that I may tell you. I am glad that I am to die. Yes, I know it. I wished nothing else. I tried so hard to die to-day, my captain, fighting your enemies; for I knew that I should never see you again, that you would sail away without a thought for the Little Marie who

wrought so hard to take you out of prison. I knew that you were going to seek one whom you love, and that I could not come with you. But now I can keep you—keep you all, till it is time for me to go away.'

She put an arm up about Wat's neck as he bent over her and drew his head down.

"Only this once," she said, smiling. "Even *she* would not be angry, for she has all—I nothing. And it is right—right—oh! so right. For you could not love the Little Marie—wife and mother she could not be; her life had been wicked—yet her heart was not all bad. And oh! but she loved you—yes, she loved you so dear. She could not help that—nor could you, my captain. Forgive Marie for loving you. But then, you should not have spoken so graciously to the poor girl to whom none ever spoke kindly or gently."

Wat bent over the girl.

"You have, indeed, been brave and good," he said; "we truly love you for what you have done. Presently we will take you to a kindly house where you shall be nursed ——"

"Nay, my captain," she whispered, smiling up at him gladly; "it is kind—yes, most sweet to hear you speak thus. But it is better that the Little Marie should die out here with your arm about her, and before the sun of this happy day goes quite down. Ah, if she had stayed in the fields always she might have been better, purer, perhaps—who knows? But then she had never known you, my captain. Maybe it is better as it is. At least, it is good to have known one true man."

She was silent a space. Wat tried hard to remember a prayer. Scarlett whistled a marching tune under his breath to keep from angry, rebellious weeping. The dying girl spoke again.

"Do not quite forget the Little Marie," she said; "her heart would not have been all bad—if only you had been there sooner to teach her how to be good."

She smiled up at him with eyes over which a pale, filmy haze was gathering. She put her hand a little further about his neck and so brought her face nearer to his.

"Did I not lead them well?" she said, eagerly and gladly; "tell me—even *she* could not have done it better! Ah! love, but this is passing sweet," she went on, more slowly and plaintively; "it is good to be held up thus, and to watch death coming to me so softly, almost sweetly. Dear, just say once that what I did was well done, and that no one at all could have done it better for you."

"None has ever done so much for me, none so given all for me, as you have done, Little Marie!" murmured Wat, his tears dropping down on the pale face of the girl—who, if she had sinned greatly, had also greatly loved.

"It is true, and I am glad," she said again, "even your love of loves herself could do no more than die for you!"

Her smile fixed itself. Her eyes grew hazier, but their long, still look stayed intently and happily upon Wat's face. Murmuring a prayer, he bent and kissed the fair brow, that was now growing cold as marble. At the touch of his lips a light, as from a paradise beyond, flamed up for a moment in the girl's eyes. Her smile grew infinitely sweeter, and the rigid lines of pain about the mouth relaxed.

"My captain—O my captain!" she whispered, sweetly as a little child that closes its eyes and nestles into sleep upon a loving shoulder.

THE DEATH OF LITTLE MARIE

CHAPTER XXI

THE GOOD SHIP "SEA UNICORN"

KATE MCGHIE was safe on board the *Sea Unicorn*, Captain Smith—a vessel English by ownership and manning, but which, for purposes which need not at this point be too closely defined, presently flew the Three Castles of the famous free city of Hamburg; though that fact would not materially have benefited any on board had one of the British fleet from the Medway overhauled Captain Smith. For on board the *Sea Unicorn* there was much contraband of war, clearly intended for the sustenance and equipment of the enemies of his Majesty King James, both in the West of England and also more particularly in Scotland.

As Kate was being taken up the side, she could hear above all the sea noises the voice of a man in angry monologue. Captain Zachariah Smith, of the good town of Poole, was exceedingly wrathful at the delay. But in spite of his anger the work of the deck went forward as well as it might on so small a vessel, when everything creaked and tumbled in the dancing jabble of the cross seas. For the wrath of Captain Smith for the most part passed off in angry words, and did not, as was usual in the merchant service of the time, very promptly materialise itself in the form of a handspike. There was considerable difficulty in getting the boat alongside on account of

the swell, and Kate was handed up like a piece of delicate goods. The man upon whose saddle she had been carried held her up lightly poised on his hand, and as the side of the plunging ship descended and the boat lurched upward, simultaneously half a dozen arms, rough but not untender, were outstretched to receive her. In a moment more she found herself safe on the deck of the *Sea Unicorn*.

"Ah, my lassie, come your ways," said a voice, which, simply because it was the voice of a woman, made Kate almost cry out with pleasure. It was a pleasant enough voice, too, and had something in the tone of it which seemed an excellent guarantee of the good intentions of its owner.

A tall, well-formed, rosily-coloured woman of forty or fifty stood by the mast, keeping her hand on a rope to steady herself as the vessel lunged and dipped her stem viciously into the trough of the waves.

"This is an uncanny and unheartsome journey for ye, my lassie," said the woman, "but it 's an auld proverb that we maun a' do as things will do wi' us."

Kate ran to her as soon as her feet were free on the deck, and caught her by the hand.

"You will help me—you will save me!" she said, looking up at the buxom woman with an agony of apprehension in her eyes. For it was a great thing after a night of terror and darkness, and after the enforced and unwelcome company of ungentle men, for the lonely girl to find a woman, and one so seemingly kindly of face and manner.

"Help ye, lassie! That will surely Betsy Landsborough do. Have no fear of that. They shall never steer ye gin ye like it not. That dour man o' mine has his orders frae the chief, belike, and in the

meantime ye'll hae to bide wi' us. But there shall none hurt or molest ye while Betsy, the wife of Alister, can win at them wi' her ten finger-nails."

"You speak like a Lowland woman," said Kate, ten minutes afterwards, when they found themselves in the little cabin in the stern of the ship. Kate was an excellent sailor, so that the plunging of the *Sea Unicorn* did not seriously affect her. By and by the heaving moderated as the ship turned tail to the land, and sped away before a strong south-easterly wind towards the shores of England. Owing to the heavy sea it had been found utterly impossible to get the long-boat on board, and Captain Smith had reluctantly sent it back, to be cared for in the little port of Lis till his return.

The cabin of the *Sea Unicorn* was a narrow place, but it was dainty enough in its appointments, and the two small white berths were covered with white linen of wonderful softness.

Now the bitterest and most immediate of Kate's anxiety was over. She knew that for the present at least she was a prisoner in the hands of kindly people, and with one of her own sex on board. So it seemed as if she could not let her companion out of her sight.

"You have not yet told me why you speak like a Lowland woman," Kate said again to her new friend.

Betsy Landsborough had not heard the first time, being busied with the arrangement of various articles of dress in a dark closet by the side of the cabin.

"'Deed aye," she answered, "and what for no? Would ye hae me speak like thae muckle ill-favoured sons o' the peat-creel, because for my sins ane o' the Highland Host carried me away frae bonny Colmonel in Carrick in the year '79? Ever since which sorrow-

ful day I have been the wife o' Alister McAlister, the tacksman of the Isle Suliscanna, near half-road across the Atlantic."

"Is your husband on board?" asked Kate.

"Aye, that he is; ye'll hae maybe seen mair o' him than ye like. For it was him that gat the chief's orders to bring ye here wi' him. He wad no hae muckle to say till ye. He is none ower gleg with the tongue at the best o' times. It was a year and a half before he understood mair o' my talk than juist 'Come here!' 'Gang there!' 'Stand oot o' the road o' me, or else I 'll ding the head aff ye!'"

Kate smiled a little at the friendly sounding and natural accent of the Ayrshire woman, and though her path was still dark as night before her, and she knew not whither she was being taken, a load consciously lifted from about her heart as she listened.

"But can you tell me," she returned, "by whose orders and for what purpose I have been stolen cruelly away from my friends and set on this vessel, going I know not where?"

"By whose orders I can tell ye, and welcome. It is by the orders o' the chief o' the McAlisters. Why, lass, it is something to be proud of. The Lord of Barra, the chief himsel', is fell fond o' ye, and, I doubt not, has ta'en ye awa' that ye may settle doon to island ways and be ready, when he gets his new coronet, to be a brave Lady of the Isles."

"But I will never marry my Lord Barra—no, nor any man but the man I love!" cried Kate indignantly.

"Hoot, toot, gently and daintily, my lassie; that is even what I said mysel', when yon great raw-boned stot first took me wi' him, never speerin' my leave. Dinna ye ken that no a Lord o' Barra has ever gotten

a wife for five hunder years, but by the auld and honoured Highland fashion o' takin' her first an' coortin' her after? Haith! there's mony a mislippened lass that wishes she had that way o't. For mony is the ane wha mairries for love and gets the butter and the comfits first, but in the afterings finds that right bitter in the belly which had been so sweet in the mouth."

And with this Sabine wisdom Betsy Landsborough vanished with a flourish of lifted petticoats up the ladder, which on the small *Sea Unicorn* served to communicate between the cabin and the deck.

The ship still sped on her course, and Kate sat below thinking of her strange adventure, which yet seemed so little and so natural to the wild, lawless folk among whom she found herself. Captain Smith incessantly prowled the deck and looked eagerly for Branksea Island, and still more anxiously for the lights of one of his Majesty's swift cruisers from the Nore. So in the meantime we will let the *Sea Unicorn* cut a furrow out of sight across the long heaving billows of the seas, while we go back to accompany Wat Gordon in his search for his lost love. Difficult and almost hopeless as the quest seemed, Wat's heart was wholly true and loyal. He never swerved from his resolve to search the world and to endure all manner of hardness till he died, rather than that he should not find his love. Whereat, as often as he put the matter into words, Jack Scarlett swore under his breath, and more than ever regretted (he stated it on his honour as a soldier) the best paymaster and the most complaisant landlady he had known for twenty years.

CHAPTER XXII

WISE JAN PETTIGREW

GENTLY, very gently, they laid in the earth the body of the Little Marie, and Wat Gordon said the prayer over her he could not remember before when she lay a-dying. It was a prayer to the Lord who takes reckoning with the intents of the heart as well as with the deeds of the body.

Under the shelter of a great dune they laid her, digging the grave as deep as they could, using the same tools with which they had entrenched the citadel she had helped them so well to defend. They laid her on the landward side, under a huge cliff of sand, so that as the winds blew and the sand wave advanced, it might bury her deeper and ever deeper till the trumpet of the archangel should blow *reveille* upon the morn of final judgment.

"And then," said Scarlett with conviction, "I had liefer take my chance with Marie the sinner than with Barra or Kersland, those precious and well-considered saints."

Wat Gordon said not a word. But he stood a longer space than for his own safety he ought, leaning upon the long handle of his spade and looking at the fresh, moist sand which alone marked the grave of the Little Marie in the waste.

The defeat which had befallen the forces of Haxo was final enough, for among the rank and file there

was not the least desire to pursue the conflict for its own sake. And moreover, the death of so many of their companions was sufficient to intimidate the survivors. Yet Wat and Scarlett were by no means free from danger. For one thing, both Haxo and the fugitives from the party of their assailants were perfectly acquainted with their identity, and the fact of Wat's being an escaped prisoner of the State was quite enough to bring upon them more legitimate though not less dangerous enemies.

By following circuitous and secluded paths, Wat and Scarlett found their way to a wooden shed on the verges of the cultivated land. The lower floors were evidently used in the winter for cattle, but the upper parts were still half full of hay, long and coarse, cut from the polders which lay at the back of the dunes.

Here among the rough, fragrant, pleasant hay the two men lay down, and Wat fell instantly asleep —the training of his old days in the heather returning to him, and in combination with the fatigues and anxieties of the night and morning, causing him to forget the manifold dangers of his position. Scarlett, having apparently left sleep behind him with his drowsy regiment, occupied himself dourly in making up the account of the pays still due to him by the paymaster of his corps, shaking his head and grumbling as each item was added to the formidable column, not a solitary stiver of which he could ever hope to receive.

It was again growing dusk when Wat awoke, much refreshed by his sleep. He found Scarlett leaning on his elbow and watching him with grim amusement.

"I suppose," he said, "once I was a fool and fathoms deep in love as well as you. But I do not believe that ever I slept in this fashion—saying over

and over 'Kate, dear Kate,' all the time, in a voice like a calf bleating for a milk-pail on the other side of the gate."

Wat turned his head and pretended not to hear. He was in no mood to barter windy compliments with Jack Scarlett, who on his part loved nothing better, save only wine and a pretty woman. The grave of the girl who had died for love of him was too new under the dunes of Lis; the fate of his own true love too dark and uncertain.

So soon, therefore, as it grew dusk enough, Wat and Scarlett betook themselves without further speech down to the little harbour, to see what might be obtained there in the way of a boat to convey them out of Holland. At first they had some thought of getting a fisherman to land them at Hamburg, whence it would be easy enough to take passage either to England or to Scotland, as they might decide.

The town of Lis was small, and its harbour but a shallow basin into which at high-water half a dozen fishing-boats at most might enter. There were few people about the long, straggling, shoreward street, and there was none of the cheerful bustle and animation characteristic of a Dutch town at evening. For many of the men were away serving in the armies of the States-General, and most of the others were at the fishing off the banks of Texil. In the harbour itself they saw nothing to suit their purpose, and none at whom to ask a question. Nor did so much as a dog bark at them.

But on the shingle outside of the harbour, at a place where a ledge of rock ran up out of the sea, with the waves gently washing one side of it, there was drawn up a ship's boat of moderate dimensions, and beside it, seated on the stern with his legs dangling

over the painted name, lounged a curious-looking individual, smoking a short, small-bowled pipe. He was a youth, of years numbering somewhere between eighteen and thirty—of the sleek-faced beardless sort that does not change much for twenty years. The most boundless self-sufficiency marked his appearance and attitude. When he saw Wat and Scarlett approach he rose lazily, stretched his long, lank legs, turned his back on them in a marked manner, and gazed seaward from under the level palm of his hand.

"I bid you good-evening," said Scarlett, saluting Sir Stork as politely as if he had been the Stadtholder of Lis; "can you tell us if in this town there are any boats that may be hired to take certain passengers to Rotterdam?"

For they thought it well, in any bargaining, to give out that city as their port, and to change the destination after they had got to sea—by persuasion or by force of arms, if necessary.

"That do I not," replied the unknown promptly, in good English, though Scarlett had spoken in Dutch.

"But the boat upon which you are leaning," pursued Scarlett, "is she not a vessel which a man may hire for a just price?"

The lad took three draws of his pipe in a consequential way before answering. He tapped the bowl meditatively on his thigh.

"This boat," he said at length, "of which I am in charge, is the property of Captain Smith of the *Sea Unicorn*, a distinguished English merchantman, burgess of the town of Poole—and I am responsible for her safe keeping till such time as she can be conveyed to that town."

"It is indeed both an onerous and an honourable task," quoth Scarlett, "and one that could only be

intrusted to a man of sense and probity—and I am sure from your appearance that you are both."

Wat Gordon was getting tired of this bandying of words, and showed symptoms of breaking in. But as the youth looked seaward, Scarlett dug his companion in the side with his elbow, in token that he was to be silent. Old Jack had an idea.

"Captain Smith was perhaps overtaken by the late storm," he said warily, "and so compelled to leave his long-boat behind him?"

"Aye, and Wise Jan Pettigrew (for so I am nominated in all Poole and Branksea) was left in charge of it," said the youth, with proud consequence. "An important cargo was taken out to the *Sea Unicorn* in this boat, I warrant, and one that will bring a high price when Captain Smith comes to reckon charges with the owner of that pretty thing."

"Ah, Wise Master Jan Pettigrew, but you carry as pretty a wit and as shrewd a tongue in that head of yours as I have met with for many a day," said Scarlett in a tone of high admiration.

"So—so," said Jan Pettigrew, complacently crossing his legs again on the boat and taking deeper and deeper whiffs of his refilled pipe.

"Aye, marry! a shrewd tongue and a biting. And whither might this treasure be going?" asked Wat, with more anxiety on his face than he ought to have shown. Scarlett darted an angry glance at him, and the tallowy youth, taking his pipe out of his mouth and holding it in his hand, regarded him with slowly dawning suspicion.

"The matter is naturally a secret of my noble employer's," he replied with dignity, "and of Captain Smith's. It has not been communicated to me with the idea of my retailing it to any chance idler on

the beach, who happens to come asking insolent questions."

"Certainly you are right, and very well said, Master Pettigrew," said Scarlett with admiration. "Wat, my lad, that settles you, I am thinking. The gentleman has his secrets, and he means to keep them. And mightily prudent of him, too. But as to this boat," he went on, "your master cannot mean you to take her along the coast by yourself all the way to meet him in Hamburg?"

"My master has not gone to Hamburg," cried Jan Pettigrew, "but first of all to his own town of Poole, or at least to a place near by, which is also a secret with himself and with those who have the honour to serve him, and in whom he reposes confidence."

Scarlett once more glanced round reprovingly at Wat.

"Ah, let this be a lesson to you, young sirrah," he said; "see how carefully and yet how politely this gentleman can keep his master's secrets? Truly, this is a fellow to be trusted."

Wise Jan Pettigrew puffed and blew upon his pipe with such swelling importance, that finally he choked and went off into a fit of coughing which threatened to end him once for all. For he was but loosely hung together, of bilious complexion, and with a weak, hollow chest. But all the time of his coughing he was struggling to tell something which pleased him, choking at once with laughter and with the reek which had gone the wrong way when Scarlett tickled his vanity with flattering words.

"*Oo-hoo,*" he cried chokingly, "and the cream of the joke—*oo-hoo*—is that the Captain, being a widower, is sure to fall in love with the lass himself. And at

Poole town, when his madcap daughter comes aboard at Branksea, as she ever does, I warrant it that she makes the fur to fly. Would that I had been there to see! 'Twill be a rare lillibullero! She'll pipe up Bob's-a-dying!"

Wat's eyes gleamed like a flame, but Scarlett darted a side look under his brows at him, so swift and fierce that he started back and was silent. "For the love of God," the look said, "hold your fool's tongue and let me finish what I have begun."

"Master Jan Pettigrew," quoth Scarlett, still more seductively, "you are a man after my own heart. Fain would I go a little cruise, as it might be for pleasure with a man of your wit and discretion. I tell thee what—Captain Smith cannot be back for a long season. Now we two are anxious to go on a little pleasure trip to England. There is a mast in the boat. The wind and weather are fair. We have both of us good Dutch guilders in our pouches. You, like other brave campaigners, have (I doubt not) both sore need of such, and a bonny young lass of your own in Poole, or elsewhere, to spend them upon. Why should not we three put the boat's head towards England this fine brisk night, with the wind in our quarter, and boldly steer our way thither? Would it not surprise Captain Smith greatly and make much for your advancement, if he should see his long-boat come sailing in after him safe and sound? And how famous would Master Jan Pettigrew be then! Why, every coastwise shipmaster would be eager to give him a fine vessel to command, on the strength of such a deed of seamanship! —while all the maids would go wild for his favour, and the homestaying lads would run crazy for very green envy for him."

As Scarlett spoke the pursing of Jan Pettigrew's mouth gradually slackened and the corners widened, till his countenance became in truth a finely open one—most like that of the monk-fish when he lies at the bottom of the sea with his jaws wide for stickle-backs and codlings to venture within. At the picture of his triumphant return his dull eyes glistened, and when Scarlett spoke of his fortune among the maids, he slid down from the boat and slapped his thigh.

"Ods fegs, I'll risk it—I have more than half a mind. But"—he scratched his head and hesitated —"the provisions for such a cruise—they will cost much?"

He looked cunningly at Scarlett, who motioned with his hand behind him to Wat. Lochinvar slid an arm about his waist and undid his belt, from which he took a couple of gold pieces. These he put into Scarlett's beckoning palm.

"The provisions, sayest thou?" quoth Scarlett, deftly jerking one of these into his pocket. "Have no care for that. Here is one piece of gold for you—go into the village of Lis and buy whatever may be necessary for our voyage. And," he continued, "there is no need to tell a man of the understanding of Jan Pettigrew that, when talking to the yokels of Lis, we are only going a little voyage to the Banks to catch the saith and limber-cod."

Scarlett rubbed his finger along the side of his nose with such contagious cunning that Jan also rubbed his and leered back at him in as knowing a manner.

"Trust Wise Jan," he said; "not a word shall they know from me—I am as deep in counsel as a draw-well. There is no bucket can draw aught from my

mind unless my will be the rope to pull it up withal."

"Haste you then," said Scarlett, "speak not to the people at all, for safety's sake, but come back quickly with the provender. And in the meantime my friend and I will fill the casks and beakers with water, so that we may be ready to start as soon as you return."

CHAPTER XXIII

WISE JAN WAXES WISER

JAN PETTIGREW started with the gold piece in his hand to get the provisions in the town of Lis-op-Zee. So soon as he was out of sight Wat Gordon was in the long-boat hunting about like a terrier dog. His eye had caught the least touch of bright colour among the rubbish in the stern of the boat. He was on his knees presently, holding a bit of ribbon in his fingers, which in hue appeared like the stone called aquamarine, or, as one would say, blue and green at the same time. He pressed it with passion to his lips.

"It is my love's!" he cried. "It is most surely hers. Thrice I saw her wear it about her beautiful neck! She must have sat in this boat not so many hours since."

"And what else do you suppose I have been getting out of that incredible lout, all the while you were staring at this bit of ribbon and trying to get in your silly word and spoil everything?" said Scarlett testily. For sleeplessness and his companion's impatience had certainly been trying to the temper.

But Wat continued to cherish his ribbon to the exclusion of all else. He had had but little to feed his affection upon, poor lad, ever since he had been clapped behind iron bars—and indeed not so very much before that.

Wat and Scarlett carried the cask and beakers to a spring which they found in an old overgrown garden not far from the harbour. They made a convenient stretcher by removing part of the rough decking from the bottom of the long-boat, and carrying the vessels to and fro upon that. They had hardly returned for the last time when they descried Wise Jan Pettigrew coming back along the shore with a whole army of helpers at his tail, carrying parcels and packages innumerable. He was in the full tide of discourse to them.

"Ye see, lads," he was saying as he came up, "my father was a man from Amersfort that came to England; and desiring to settle there, he had dealings with my mother, who was a farmer's daughter in the county of Dorset. And in due time he married her —yes, in good sooth, he married her, and that is why I am called Jan Pettigrew. For my father must have me called Jan. He would hear of nothing else. Whereat my mother, not to be beaten, swore that some part of my name should carry with it a good old English smell. So Jan Pettigrew I was christened, of my mother's surname, with my father standing by and never daring so much as to say a word!"

The louts of Lis were chuckling and nudging each other with suppressed laughter, for it was obvious that Wise Jan Pettigrew had been looking most unwisely upon the Hollands when it gave its colour aright in the cup. However, they hastened to plant their parcels and stores in the long-boat, and meantime they gazed with wide-open eyes at Wat and Scarlett.

"These honest gentlemen," said the wise and reticent Jan, "are for the fishing. Oh yes, they are for the fishing"—his finger went to his nose—"you all understand, lads, the fishing. Then when we

come back to Lis here to make a declaration to the burgomeister of the number and weight of the fine fish we have taken on the Banks, why, there will be drink at the Three Castles for every honest fellow here!"

He would have said more, but Scarlett, growing suddenly tired of his clatter, tumbled him unceremoniously into the boat, and cried out to the men of Lis:—

"Here's good silver for whoever will give us a hand that the boat may be launched—silver to drink the health of the Prince this very night at the inn of Lis in sound, stark Hollands!"

The men and boys, hearing this, gave a rousing cheer, and setting their strength to the long-boat of the *Sea Unicorn*, they rattled it down the pebbles and out into the heave and murmur of the incoming tide. Scarlett ran his hands through the pockets of Jan Pettigrew's clothing, and handed all the small silver which he found there—a round handful—to the tallest of the 'prentice lads.

"There," he said, "drink the Prince's health, and if there be any over, drink to the health of Captain Smith of the *Sea Unicorn*, and of all his crew and passengers."

And at this liberal and comprehensive toast the lads on shore again cheered, as men with drink in prospect will cheer at anything.

There was still a rousing breeze astern, and making Jan Pettigrew keep awake so that he might at least direct them in the necessary manœuvres, Wat and Scarlett proceeded to erect the mast and unbend the sail with ignorant, unseamanlike hands. But after a little, under guidance, they did featly enough, so that the distance widened, and they saw with

delight the shores of Holland drop back and the solemn, waffing windmills stand up in a long row out of the polder.

"Now for England and Kate!" cried Wat, as though they had already found both.

Jan Pettigrew, who had become noisier and more oracular, so soon as he found himself on the lift and heave of the sea, and the boat began to cradle buoyantly among the short waves, cried out to Wat and Scarlett to set the foresail. This Wat attempted to do, but, though he found the small triangular sail readily enough, he could neither attach it to the bowsprit nor yet bend it properly.

Then Jack Scarlett did a thing which exceedingly astonished Master Jan. That wise youth was lying in the stern-sheets, with his pipe in his hand, content to issue commands, and laughing and sneering at the landsmen's awkward manner of executing them.

When he had ordered them for the third time to bend the foresail, Scarlett turned on him and very curtly bade him do it himself and look spry. Jan, the self-satisfied one, could scarce believe his ears. He felt astounded, his pipe went out, his jaw began to fall and his mouth to open as it had done while he listened to Scarlett's eloquence on the shore.

But Scarlett was in a different mood this time. He simply repeated his advice in a louder tone.

Then Wise Jan Pettigrew grew sulky and pointedly declined, asserting that he had not come upon this particular cruise for the purpose of pulling ropes with two greenhorns to do it for him. As the words left his mouth he felt something cold touch his right temple. He turned rapidly, and the movement

brought his entire cheek against the cold bell mouth of a horse-pistol. The self-satisfaction flickered out of his face. His gin-reddened cheek whitened to chalk, and he began to tremble violently in all his limbs.

"Get up and bend the foresail without a word more!" quoth Scarlett sternly, "and remember that for the remainder of this cruise, you will do very precisely as you are bid."

Jan, being upon compulsion really wise, instantly and without a murmur complied. In a minute the foresail was properly bent and also a little square sail in the stern—which last had a great effect in steadying the boat in the cross winds which were now whipping the tops off the waves and driving the spray over the boat, as they sat under the shelter of the windward side.

Presently Scarlett began to explain the situation to Jan Pettigrew. He told him that though he must be ready to work the boat in all matters of seamanship, yet both of the others would assist him to the best of their ability. He must, however, be willing to go where they wished and to obey their orders. In the event of their cruise being successful he was to receive ten gold pieces. And even if it were not, in the event of his proving faithful and silent, he should have five for his pains—which was a great deal more than he would have received on many voyages from Captain Smith of the *Sea Unicorn*.

At first Jan lay sulkily enough in the bow of the boat and pretended to pay no attention to Scarlett's words. But presently he grumbled, "How can I or any man take a boat to England without so much as a compass or a chart?"

"That is not my business," said Scarlett; "it is surely a strange seaman that cannot keep a boat to

its course for a few miles by the stars. All I know is that if you do it not, I shall be compelled most reluctantly to blow your brains out, and let your carcase drop overboard to feed the fishes."

He pronounced this in so matter-of-fact a voice that the lad came instantly aft, and began to search carefully in the side lockers and drawers. Two of these were locked and had to be opened with the blade of Scarlett's dagger. Wat cut away part of the wood round the wards of the lock, into which aperture Jan inserted an iron spike that lay in the bottom of the boat, whereupon the locks gave sharply in both cases. In one compartment was a small compass, and in the other a sheaf of charts.

. . . . . .

When the morning broke on the third day of their cruise a long, low island was in sight immediately in front. Then a flat coast with rolling country stretched away behind, with many woods shining paly green, and looking newly-washed as the morning sun sucked the night dews from the leaves. An ancient castle stood grey and stern on the left, and far to the right the tower of a noble church took the sun and gleamed like the white sail of a ship.

Wise Jan Pettigrew, who had long since composed himself to all his duties and become the devoted slave of Jack Scarlett (whom his eyes followed with a kind of rapt adoration), pointed with his finger.

"Branksea!" he cried, with pride both in voice and gesture.

And indeed he had some reason for self-congratulation. For the cross channel voyage in an open boat, together with a long trip down the coast, had not often been so successfully undertaken.

Keeping the boat well to the left, they rounded a low spit of shingle and turned in sharply towards a tiny landing-place, from which a neat path extended up into the woods.

A flag was flying among the trees and making a splash of brave colour among the greenery.

CHAPTER XXIV

MADCAP MEHITABEL

THE long-boat grated on the beach and Wise Jan was the first ashore. Scarlett and Wat disembarked in more leisurely fashion and stretched themselves luxuriously after their long and cramped boat voyage.

They were employing themselves in taking out of the stern such articles as they had stowed there, when a challenging voice rang out clear and high from the woods above.

"Jan Pettigrew! Jan Pettigrew!" it cried, "what do you here with our long-boat? Why are you not in the Low Countries, making love to the little Dutch maids with faces like flat-irons?"

"No, they ain't neither," cried Wise Jan, apparently not at all astonished, making a face in the direction of his unseen querist; "they 're a sight better-looking than you be—and they comb their hair!"

He looked apologetically at Scarlett.

"Heed her not," he said in a low voice, "'tis but crosspatch Mehitabel Smith, our master's daughter. He has spoilt her by sparing of the wand to beat her with when she was young, and now that she is grown —and well grown, too—she will be for ever climbing trees and crying uncivil words to decent folk as they go by, and all, as she counts it, for merriment and mischief-making."

"Ah, Jan! Wise Jan Pettigrew," the voice went on, "Jan that drank the cow's milk and gave the calf water, because it was better for its stomach—you are right early astir. And who are the brisk lads with you? I know not that my father will be pleased to see strangers on Branksea. Hold up your head, Jan, and learn to answer a lady civilly. You have surely forgot or mislaid all the manners you ever had. Shut your mouth, Jan—I do advise it; and do not, I pray you, so mump with your chin and wamble with your legs!"

"Madcap!" cried Jan, stung by the pointed allusions to his defects of person, "my legs are as straight as yours be, and serve me well, albeit I wrap them not, as women do, in clouts and petticoats. And at least if my legs are crooked and my jaw slack my eyes are straight set in my head."

"And if eyes do look two ways," retorted the voice out of the unseen, "'tis only with trying to keep them on the antics of both Jan Pettigrew's legs at once; for your knees do so knock together like Spanish castanets, and your legs so jimble-jamble in their sockets, that 'tis as good as a puppet-with-strings dancing at the fair just to watch 'em!"

Jan looked still more apologetically at Scarlett.

"I am black ashamed," he said; "but, after all, she means no harm by it. She has never had any one to teach her religion or good manners, but has run wild here on Branksea among the goats and the ignorant sailor men."

"I hear thee, Wise Jan," cried the voice again; "tell no lying tales on your betters, or I in my turn will tell the tale of how Wise Jan went to Portsmouth—how the watch bade him go in and bathe, because that the lukewarm town's water was good for

warts. And when he had gone in, glad at heart to hear the marvel, being exceedingly warty, the watch stole his clothes, and then put him a week in Bridewell for walking of the streets without them in sight of the admiral's mother-in-law!"

"'Tis a lie!" shouted Jan, looking up from the boat, out of which he had carefully extracted all the various belongings he had brought with him; "a great and manifest lie it is! It was, as all men know, for fighting with six sailor men of the fleet that I was shut up in Bridewell."

"Wise Jan, Wise Jan, think upon what parson says concerning the day of judgment!" replied the voice reproachfully. "For if thus you deny your true doings and confess them not, you will set all the little devils down below to the carrying of firewood to be ready against the day of your hanging."

Wise Jan did not deign to reply. He resigned the unequal wordy fray, and taking a back-load of stuff on his shoulders, he led the way up the neatly-gravelled path, which wound from the little wooden landing-stage into the green and arching woods.

As Scarlett and Wat followed after and looked about them with much interest, a tall maid, clad in a blue skirt and figured blouse, and with her short tangles of hair blowing loose about her ears, dropped suddenly and lightly as a brown squirrel upon the path before them. Whereat Wat and Scarlett stopped as sharply as if a gun had been loosed off at them; for the girl had handed herself unceremoniously down from among the leaves, and there she stood right in their path, as little disconcerted as if that were the customary method of receiving strangers upon the Isle of Branksea.

"I bid you welcome, gentlemen," she said, bowing

to them like a courteous boy of the court. Indeed, her kirtle was not much longer than many a boy's Sunday coat, and her hair, cropped short and very curly, had a boy's cap set carelessly upon the back of it.

Scarlett stared vaguely at the pleasant apparition.

"The Lord have mercy!" he said, as if to himself; "is this another of them? 'Tis indeed high time we found that runaway love."

But Wat Gordon, to whom courtesy to women came by nature, placed himself before the old soldier. He had his cap in his hand and bowed right gracefully. Scarlett might cozen Wise Jan an he liked; but he, Wat Gordon, at least knew better how to speak to a woman than did any ancient Moustache of the Wars.

"My Lady of the Isle," he said, in the manner of the time, "I thank you for your most courteous and unexpected welcome. We are two exiles from Holland, escaping from prison. This good gentleman of yours has helped us to set our foot again upon the shores of Britain, and in return we have aided him to restore his master's property."

The girl listened with her head at the side, like a bird making up its mind whether or not to fly. When Wat was half way through with his address she yawned.

"That is a long sermon and very dull," she said; "one might almost as well have been in church. Come to breakfast."

So, much crestfallen, Wat followed meekly in the wake of Scarlett, whose shoulders were shaking at the downfall of the squire of dames. At the corner of the path, just where it opened out upon a made road of beaten earth, Jack Scarlett turned with the

obvious intention of venturing a facetious remark, but Wat met him in the face with a snarl so fierce that for peace's sake he thought better of it and relapsed into covertly smiling silence.

"If you crack so much as one of your rusty japes upon me, Jack Scarlett, I declare I 'll set the point of my knife in your fat back!" he said viciously.

And for the rest of the way Scarlett laughed inwardly, while Wat followed, plodding along sullenly and in an exceedingly evil temper.

The house to which they went was a curious one for the time and country. It was built wholly of wood, with eaves that came down five or six feet over the walls, so that they formed a continuous shelter all about the house, very pleasant in hot weather. A wooden floor, scrubbed very white and with mats of foreign grasses and straw upon it, went all round under these wide eaves. Twisted shells, shining stones, and many other remarkable and outlandish curiosities were set in corners or displayed in niches.

At the outer door the girl turned sharply upon them.

"My name is Mehitabel Smith," she said, "and this is my father's house. I like your looks well enough, but I would also know your degree and your business. For Branksea is for the nonce in my keeping, and that you have come with Wise Jan Pettigrew is no recommendation—since, indeed, the creature takes up with every wastrel and run-the-country he can pick up."

Wat had not got over the rebuff of his first introduction, and sulkily declined to speak; but Scarlett hastened to assure Mistress Mehitabel of

the great consideration Wat and he enjoyed both at home and abroad.

"And for what were you in prison in Holland?" she said. "Was *he* in prison?" she continued, without waiting for any answer, looking at Wat.

Scarlett nodded. He had it on the tip of his tongue to say that it had been owing to a brawl in a tavern. But at the last moment, seeing Wat's dejected countenance, he made a little significant gesture of drawing his hand across his throat.

"High treason—a hanging or heading matter!" he answered, nodding his head very gravely.

The girl looked at Wat with a sudden access of interest.

"Lord, Lord, I would that I lived in Holland! High treason, and at his age!" she exclaimed. "What chances must he not have had!"

Without further questioning concerning antecedents and character she led the way within. They passed through a wide hall, and down a gallery painted of a pleasant pale green, into a neat kitchen with windows that opened outward, and which had a brick-built fireplace and a wide Dutch chimney at the end. Brass preserving pans, shining skillets and tin cullenders made a brave show, set in a sort of diminishing perspective upon the walls.

"Now if ye want breakfast, ye must e'en put-to your hand and help me to set the fire a-going, Grey Badger!" she cried suddenly, looking at Scarlett. "Go get water to the spring. It is but a hundred yards beyond that oak in the hollow. And you, young Master High Treason, catch hold of that knife and set your white high-treasonable hands to slicing the bacon."

CHAPTER XXV

TRUE LOVE AND PIG-NUTS

MEHITABEL SMITH calmly went to the inner door, and, reaching down a linen smock, she slipped it on over her head and fastened it in with a belt at the waist. Wat and Scarlett moved meekly and obediently to their several duties, and the business of breakfast-making went gaily forward.

When Wat returned from the side-table with the bacon sliced, Mehitabel Smith had the frying-pan ready and a fire of brushwood crackling merrily beneath it.

"Do you not think," she said, without looking at him, being busy buttering the bottom of the pan, "that fish and bacon go well together when one is hungry? For me, I am always hungry on Brankesea. Were you ever hungry in prison?"

Wat muttered something ungracious enough, which might have been taken as a reply to either question, but the girl went on without heeding his answer. She sprinkled oatmeal over half a dozen fresh fish, and presently she had them making a pleasant, birsling sound in the pan, shielding her eyes occasionally with her hand when they spattered.

"You must have been very happy in prison?" she said.

And for the first time she looked directly at him for an answer. Wat was astonished.

"Happy!" he said, "why, one does not expect to be very happy in a Dutch prison, or for that matter in any other. Prisons are not set up to add to folks' happiness that ever I heard."

"But what experiences!" she cried, "what famous 'scapes and chances of adventure! To be in prison at your age (you are little more than a lad), and that for high treason! Here on Branksea one has no such advantages. Only ships and seamen, pots of green paint, and hauling up and down the flag, or at best ninnies that think they ought to make love to you, because, forsooth, you are a girl. Ah, I would rather be in prison a thousand years!"

Wat watched her without speaking, as she moved nimbly and with a certain deft, defiant ease about the sprucely-painted kitchen.

"Do you believe in love? I don't!" she said unexpectedly, turning the fish out on a platter, and lifting the pan from the fire to prepare it for the bacon which Wat had been holding all the time in readiness for his companion.

"Yes, I do believe in love," said Wat soberly, as though he had been repeating the Apostles' Creed. He thought of the little tight curls crisping so heart-breakingly about the ears of his love, and also of the grave which had been dug so deep under the sand-hills of Lis. There was no question. He believed with all his heart in love.

The girl darted a swiftly inquiring glance at him. But her suspicions were allayed completely by Wat's downcast and abstracted gaze. He was not thinking at all of her. She gave a sigh, half of relief and half of disappointment.

"Oh, yes," she returned quickly, "fathers and mothers, godfathers and godmothers, tutors and

governors—that sort of love. But do you believe in love really—the love they sing about in catches, and which the lads prate of when they come a-wooing?"

Wat nodded his head still more soberly. "I believe in true love," he said.

"Oh then, I pray you, tell me all about her!" cried Mehitabel Smith, at once laying down the fork with which she had been turning the bacon, and sitting down to look at Wat with a sudden increase of interest.

Scarlett came in a moment after and sniffed, with his nose in the air; then he walked to the pan in which the bacon was skirling.

"It seems to me that the victual is in danger of burning," he said. "I think next time it were wiser for the Grey Badger to fry the pan, and for those that desire to talk—ah! of high treason—to go and fetch the water."

Mehitabel started up and began turning the bacon quickly.

"A touch of the pan gives flavour, I have ever heard," she said unabashed; "and if you like it not, Grey Badger, you can always stick to the fish."

When breakfast was over, Scarlett and Wise Jan were ordered to wash the dishes. This they proceeded to do, clattering the platters and rubbing them with their towels awkwardly, using their elbows ten times more than was necessary. Scarlett worked with grim delight, and Jan with many grumblings. Then, having seen them set to their tasks, Mistress Mehitabel made Wat lift a pair of wooden buckets, scrubbed very white, and accompany her to the spring. She went first along the narrow path to show him the way. She had taken off her cooking-smock, and was again in the neat kirtle of dark blue

cloth, which showed her graceful young figure to advantage.

When they reached the well, Mehitabel appeared to be in no hurry to return. She sat down, and to all appearance lost herself in thought, leaning her chin upon her hand and looking into the water.

"There was a lass here but yester-morn, no further gone," she said, "who believed in love. She gave me this, and bade me show it to the man that should come after her also believing in love."

She held out a small heart of wrought gold, with letters graven upon it. Wat leaped forward and snatched it out of her hand.

"It is hers—Kate's. I have seen it a thousand times about her neck. She wore it ever upon the ribbon of blue."

And he pressed the token passionately to his lips. Mehitabel Smith looked on with an interested but entirely dispassionate expression.

"I wonder," she said presently, "if it is as good to be in love as to sit in the tree-tops and eat pig-nuts?"

But Wat did not hear her; or, hearing, did not answer.

"It is Kate's—it is hers—hers. It has rested on her neck. She has sent it to me," he murmured. "She knew that I would surely compass the earth to seek her—that so long as life remained to me I should follow and seek her till I found her."

"Faith!" said Mehitabel, "I do believe this is the right man. He has the grip of it better than any I ever listened to. If he so kiss the gift, what would he not do to the giver?"

"Tell me," said Wat, looking eagerly and tremulously at her, "what said she when she gave you the

token?—in what garb was she attired?—was her countenance sad?—were they that went with her, kind?"

"Truly and truly this is right love, and no make-believe," said the girl, clapping her hands; "never did I credit the disease before, but ever laughed at them that came a-courting with their breaking hearts and their silly, sighing ardours. But this fellow means it, every word. He has well learned his lover's hornbook. For he asks so many questions, and has them all tumbling over one another like pigs turned out of a clover pasture."

Wat made a little movement of impatience.

"I pray you be merciful, haste and tell me—for I have come far and suffered much!"

The pathetic ring in his voice moved the wayward daughter of Captain Smith of the *Sea Unicorn*.

"I will tell you," she answered more seriously, "but in my own way. It was, I think, this lass of yours that sat here in the house-place and talked with me but four-and-twenty hours agone. She looked not ill in health but pale and anxious, with dark rings about her eyes. Those that were about her were kind enough, but watched her closely day and night—for that was the order of their master. But I am sure that the Lowland woman who was with her would, in an evil case, prove a friend to your love."

"And whither have they taken her?" asked Wat anxiously.

Mehitabel Smith looked carefully every way before she attempted to answer.

"The name of the place I cannot tell at present. It is an island, remote and lonely, in the country of the Hebridean Small Isles; but I heard my father say that it bore somewhere near where the Long Island hangs his tail down into the ocean."

"She has gone in your father's ship, then?" asked Wat.

"Aye, truly," said Mehitabel Smith; "but your lass is to be taken off the *Sea Unicorn* at some point on the voyage, and thence to her destination in a boat belonging to the islanders. I heard the head man of them so advising my father."

As the girl went on with her tale, Wat began to breathe a little more freely. He had feared things infinitely worse than any that had yet come to pass. He was now on the track, and, best of all, he had the token which Kate had sent to him, in her wonderful confidence that he would never cease from seeking her while life lasted to him.

Mehitabel watched him quietly and earnestly. At last she said a little wistfully, "I think, after all, it must be better than eating pig-nuts. I declare you are fonder of that lass than you are of yourself."

Wat laughed a lover's laugh of mellowest scorn. Mehitabel went on. "And I suppose you want to be with her all the time. You dream about her hair and the colour of her eyes; you will kiss that bit of gold because she wore it about her neck. That is well enough for you. But to my thinking this love is but a sort of midsummer madness. For it is better to sleep sound than to dream; any golden guinea is worth more than that tiny heart on a ribbon, and would buy infinitely more cates,—while it is best of all to sit heart-free among the topmost branches of the beeches, and whistle catches while the sea wind cradles you on the bough and the leaves rustle you to sleep like a lullaby. What, I pray you, is this love of yours to that?"

"That you will know one day," said Wat, sagely nodding his head, "and it may not be long, for your

eyes are looking for love, and in love what one looks for, that one finds. Hearken, I have stood one against fifty for the sake of my love. Willingly and gladly I have left land, rank, friends, future; I have made them all no more than broken toys that I might win my love. I count my life itself but a little thing, scarce worth the offering, all for her sake!"

"And is it because you hope to be so happy with her that you do all these things?" asked Mehitabel, now perfectly sober and serious, and clearly anxious to comprehend the matter.

"Nay," answered Wat in a low voice, "to be happy may indeed come to us—pray God it may and speedily. But to prove one's love as a man proves the edge of his sword, to do somewhat great for the beloved, to be something worthier, higher, better, to make your love glad and proud that she loves you, and that she possesses your love—these are greater aims than merely selfishly to be happy."

Mehitabel sighed as she rose.

"I suppose it must be so," she said, "but it is a great and weary mystery. Moreover, I have yet to see the man I would choose before a plate of early strawberries. And, anyway, pig-nuts, dug out of the ground and eaten on the tree-tops are right excellent good!"

CHAPTER XXVI

A BOAT IN SIGHT AT SULISCANNA

THERE was one spot on Suliscanna, the island to which she had been brought, that Kate especially loved. It was where the great Lianacraig precipice, a thousand feet of hard rock, curiously streaked with the green of serpentine and the white of the breeding and roosting ocean birds, sank sheer into the foam-fringed emerald wash of the sea.

At the eastward end of the vast wall there began a beach of pure white sand, curving round in a clean sickle-sweep for a mile and a half to the mural face of the cliffs of Aoinaig, which served for its northern gateway.

To this wide strand, with its frowning guardian watch-towers of tall cliff on either side, Kate came every day, week in and week out, during the first months of her isolation. She took her way thither from the low, thatched hut of Mistress Alister McAlister, in which she dwelt in a cleanliness and comfort more reminiscent of Carrick than characteristic of the neighbouring houses of Suliscanna. The cattle did not occupy the first apartment in the house of Mistress McAlister. The floor did not, as was commonly the case, rise gradually towards the roof upon a rich deposit of "peat-coom" and general *débris*, solidified by the spent water of the household and the trampling of many feet.

The house in which Kate dwelt on Suliscanna was

paved with flags of slate, which Alister and his wife had put in position, to the great scandal of the entire island—including the minister of the Small Isles himself, who preached most powerfully against the practice as pampering to poor human vanity, and causing foolish people to grasp at worldly state and pomp, and so neglect the glories of another and a better world.

But Mistress McAlister had her answer ready to that.

"I am of opinion," she retorted, when the sermon was reported to her, "that Alister and me will no be left strange and friendless up yonder on the streets of gold, just because we happen to prefer clean stanes to dirty peat and fish-banes here below."

And for this pointed rejoinder Mistress McAlister was debarred the table of communion.

"I'm no carin'," she said. "There's guid and godly ministers in my ain country that has suffered mickle for godliness. What matters it if I do suffer a wee here for cleanliness? The one is sib to the other, they say. And wha kens but after all it may help one's eternal interest to bide away from sic a kirk as they have here?—no' a wiselike word nor a solemn reproof from the beginning to the end of the exercises!"

This bright morning Kate stood alone on the white fringe of sand. She shaded her eyes with her hand as she looked at the far blue hills of the mainland, and often she sighed heavily.

For weeks she had watched for a boat to come. She had cast every bottle she could obtain on the island into the race of the tide which passed Lianacraig, each with a message enclosed telling of her place of seclusion. Now she could only pace the shore and wait.

"He *will* come," she said to herself, with a limitless faith. "I am sure he loves me, and that he will find me. Prison bars could not contain him, nor dangers daunt him. I know he will follow and find me. God make it soon—before the other comes."

Her mind went back to the cold sinister eyes of my Lord of Barra, and she shuddered even in the hot sunshine.

"Then would the danger begin," she said, "for though all these folks are kind to me, yet not even the minister nor Betsy Landsborough would stir a hand to save me from the chief. Such a marriage is customary. It is the way of the clan. The Lords of Barra have ever chosen their brides in this fashion, they say. I am here alone on an island without boats. The chief has ordered it so. None are allowed to approach or land on Suliscanna till the master comes to claim the captive and the slave."

The girl's wonderful dark eyes had mysterious depths in them as she went over in her heart the perils and difficulties of her unknown future.

"But never, while I live, will I be untrue to him whom I love. If I cannot be his, at least I shall never be another's. And if they try to force me to that which I loathe—thank God there is always a way out! Gladly would I die rather than that any other should take the place that is his alone—my king, my husband!"

She spoke the last words very softly, but her eyes looked wistfully out towards the far hills beyond the sea, over which she waited for him to come. Then she blushed red from neck to brow at the sound of her own whisper. She even turned her about swiftly

to see that none had heard, and that no bird of the air could carry the matter.

But only the sea swallows circled widely above, along the black wet skerries the gulls wailed, and the silly moping guillemots sat in rows upon the rocks of Lianacraig. All were intent upon their own concerns that bright morning, and up among the tiny green crofts she saw Mistress McAlister, a lowland sunbonnet on her head, flashing in and out of her door in that lively and sprightly fashion which distinguished her movements from the solid sloth characteristic of even the busiest moments of the other goodwives of Suliscanna.

Kate paced the shore, and thought within herself the still assured thoughts of one whose mind is made up about the main issue, and who can afford quietly to consider concerning matters less important.

The sea was very still this day about Suliscanna. The white surf-rim round the great cliffs was hardly to be noted. The gap-toothed caves which pierce them were still. The roaring and hissing of the "bullers" were not heard. Only in front of the island to landward the tides swayed and ran like a mill-race, where the ledges rose black and dripping from the deep, and the currents from the ocean swirled onwards, or sucked back through the narrows in dangerous whirlpools and strange leaping hillocks of sea water.

Kate stood wondering at their beauty, without the least idea that these oily swirls and boiling hummocks of smooth green water were among the most dangerous sea perils to be met with all the way from Pentland to Solway.

Suddenly her eyes lit on a dark speck far away out upon the bright plain. It might have been the

head of a swimming seal, or the black razor-edge of a large skerry showing over the rush of the tide. But as she watched the dot grew blacker and larger. A boat was certainly approaching the island. Kate stood trembling. For the issue meant life and death to her. It might be her tyrant come to claim his captive. It might be her saviour come to save.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE TIDE RACE OF SULISCANNA

KATE MCGHIE stood looking across the boiling, hillocky water of the Suck of Suliscanna in the direction of the boat, which moment by moment blackened and grew larger, rising steadily towards her out of the east. The day was so still, the tide so smooth as it swept inshore after passing the oily "bullers" of the roost, that she had no idea of the world of danger those in the adventurous bark had to pass before her prow could grate on the white sand of the landing-beach between the opposing headlands of Aionaig and Lianacraig.

Kate's heart beat strangely, almost painfully. It was wonderful, she thought, that men should undergo perils and cross a world's seas for a simple girl's sake. Yet there was pleasure, too, in the thought; for somehow she knew that those who approached loved her and came from far seeking her good.

"It is he—it is surely he!" so her soul chanted its glad triumph within her. "Did I not say that he could break prison-bands and come to find me—that he would over-pass unruly seas only to look on my face? Has any maid in the world a lover true like mine? And he will break my prison also and take me away. And with him I am ready to go to the ends of the earth, fearlessly as though he had been my mother."

Poor lassie! Little she knew the long weary travel she had before her ere it could come to that.

But even as she watched she became conscious of a quick stir and movement among the usually so indolent islanders behind her. Hardly she dared to lift her eyes from the approaching boat, which came on with a little square sail rigged on a temporary mast as long as the wind held, and then with flashing dips of rhythmic oars whenever the breeze dropped away.

The voices of the men of Suliscanna crying harshly to each other among the craig-heads and cliff-edges high above her sounded to Kate's ears like a louder brawling of the sea-fowl. The sound had an edge on it, shrill, keen, and bitter as the east wind in mid January. Yet there was something in it, too, of new. The girl had heard the like of it before, at the kennels of Cumlodan, when the bloodhounds for the Whig-tracking were waiting to be fed, and springing up with their feet on the bars.

"Eh, sirs me! Guid help the poor souls that are in that boat; they will either gang doon bodily to feed the fish, or else be casten up in gobbets the size o' my neive upon the shore!" cried the voice of Mrs. McAlister at Kate's elbow.

"They can never weather it, and if they do they are nought advantaged after all. For the men of the isle are that worked upon with the fear of my Lord, and his threat to clean them off the isle of Suliscanna, like a count off a bairn's slate, if they let the lass escape, that they declare they will slay the poor lads so soon as ever they set foot on the land, if indeed they ever win as far."

In her agitated pre-occupation the tall woman from Ayrshire had let her hair fall in a bushy mass over

her back, as it was her habit to do in the evenings after supper when preparing for bed. She kept working at it nervously while she watched, twisting up its comely masses in order to fix them in their places with bone pins; and anon, as the boat tacked shorter and shorter to avoid this hidden peril and that, pulling them out and letting it fall again in wavy coils, so overpowering had become her agitation.

Suddenly startled by a peculiar wavering cry from the hill, she took Kate's hand and ran with her along the path which led to the rocks of Lianacraig.

"Ye will never be for thinking," Bess Landsborough said to the girl as they ran, "that this is him that likes ye—the lad ye left in the Tolbooth irons in Holland, gotten free and come after ye?"

But Kate only clasped her friend's hand tighter and answered nothing.

"Poor lass! Poor lass!" she said. "Ye believe that your lad would do as muckle for you after a' that has come and gane between ye. But lads are not what they were in my young days! Pray God that ye may be mistaken, for gin this be your lad come seeking ye I fear he is as good as dead, either from the sharp rocks of Suliscanna or from the sharper knives of the wild McAlisters."

From the southern ridge of the headland of Lianacraig Kate and her companion could look almost directly down upon the gambols of the treacherous Suck of Suliscanna. The boat lay clear to their sight upon the surface of the sea—two men in her, one sitting with the rope of the sheet in his hand, and the other at the stern with an oar to turn her off from the hidden dangers, as the seething run of the tidal currents brought her head on to some sunken reef or dangerous skerry. Sometimes ere the voyagers could

tack or turn in their unsailorlike fashion, a white spurt of foam would suddenly spring up under their very bows as a swell from the Atlantic lumbered lazily in, or again a backdraw of the current would swirl upward from some submarine ledge, and raise a great breaking pyramid of salt water on a spot where a moment before there had been only the smooth hiss of water moving very swiftly.

The islanders, who alone realised the terrible danger of the two in the boat, lay for the most part wholly silent, some on the cliff's immediate edge, and others behind little sodded breastworks which had been erected, partly to keep the wind off when, as now, they kept watch from their posts of observation, and partly for the drying of their winter's fuel.

Mistress McAlister indicated the eager gazers with her elbows.

"See the Heelantmen," she said; "they are a' up there! Lord, what Christians! The verra minister is amang them himsel'—they canna help it. The spirit is on them ever since langsyne the Spaniard's ship drave in, and brocht a' that peltry of mahogany aumries and wrought cupboards, and forbye the queer fashions of knitting that the sailor folk of the crew learned them after they wan ashore. But they learn little from them that 's shipwrecked on Suliscanna noo. For them that 's no deid corpses before they come to land, get a bit clour wi' a stane that soon puts them oot o' conceit wi' a' this world o' sin and suffering."

Kate's face was white and drawn, but she hardly noticed the woman's fell prophecies.

For all the while the two men in the boat were labouring hard, fighting tensely for life, and every eye on the island was upon them. They had reached one

of the smoothest and therefore most dangerous places, when suddenly the black back of a skip-jack dolphin curved over like a mill-wheel beside the boat, and a hoarse shout went up from the islanders of Suliscanna, who lay breathlessly waiting the event on the rocks of Lianacraig.

"It's a' by wi' the poor lads noo!" said Bess McAlister, "a' but the warsle in the water and the grip o' the saut in their thrapples! The deil's ain beast is doon there watching for them."

"God help my Wat!" sobbed Kate, half to herself and half to the Divinity—who, as the Good Book says, can do wonders in the great waters.

"Aye, 'deed, lass, as ye say, God help him! He never had mair need. The dead-fish are louping for him and the other with him."

Just at this moment Kate uttered a cry and clasped her hands, for the boat was heaved up from the side nearest the cliffs on the summit of a toppling pyramid of water. The mast fell over, and the whole breadth of the sail hugged the surface of the sea. Then the swirling tide-race took hold of her and sucked her under. In a smooth sea, without a particle of wind, the two men went down within cry of the rocks of Suliscanna, and not a hand could be stretched out to save them. Only now and then something black, a wet air-filled blob of the sail, the surge-tossed back of a man, or the angle of the boat, showed dark for a moment upon the surface of the pale water, and then was carried under, all racing northward in the grip of the angry tide current.

Kate McGhie had fallen on her knees.

"God forgive his sins and take me soon to him!" she said.

"Wheest, lass! Nae Papist prayers in my hearin',"

said Mrs. McAlister in her ear. "Gin that be your lad, he 's dead and gane. And that 's a hantle better than dying on the gully-knives of the McAlisters."

At the sight of the disaster beneath them on the wrinkled face of the water all the islanders had leaped suddenly erect behind their shelters and craggy hiding-places. Each man stood with his head thrown forward in an attitude of the most intent watchfulness. And once when the stern of the boat cocked up, and a man's arm rose like the fin of a fish beside it for a moment, every son of Alister expelled the long-withholden air from his lungs in a sonorous "Hough!" which indicated that in his opinion all was over. Instantly the islanders of Suliscanna collected here and there at likely places along the shore into quick gathering knots and clusters which dissolved as quickly. They discussed the disaster from every point of view. The minister was specially active, going about from group to group.

"We must e'en submit," he was saying; "it is the will of God. And after all, though both men and boat had been cast ashore, it is little likely that they would have had anything worth lifting on them. They were just poor bodies that by misadventure have been cast away in a fog, and would have no other gear about them save the clothes on their backs."

But Alister McAlister was of another mind.

"Work like this is enough to make an unbeliever out of a God-fearing man," he affirmed to his intimates, "to see what Providence will permit—a good fishing-boat with a mast and sail in the charge of two landward men that did not even know where to let her go to pieces, so that Christians and men of sense might get some good of her. For the fools let

her sink plumb down in the Suck of Suliscanna instead of driving her straight inshore against the hill of Aoinaig, whence she would have come safe as weed-drift to our very feet."

And there were more of Alister's opinion than of the minister's, whose spiritual consolation was discounted, at any rate, by the fact that he was officially compelled to speak well of Providence.

But before long there was another sound on the Isle of Suliscanna. Away on the edge of the bay under the cliffs a group of men was to be seen grappling some object which repeatedly slipped from their poles between two long shore-skirting reefs. It lay black and limp in the water, and again and again, breaking from their hands, it returned to the push of the tide in the narrow gut with a splash of flaccid weight.

"Lord, what's yon they hae gotten?" cried Mistress McAlister, as soon as she had seen the figures of the men collecting about the thing, like carrion crows gathering about a dead sheep on the hill. "Thank God, my Alister loon is away south'ard on the heuchs of Lianacraig."

She stood on tiptoe and looked for the flash of the killing knife or the dull crash of the stone with which commonly the wreckers ensured silence and safety, when any came alive ashore along with wreckage of price from the great waters.

The heads of the men were all bent inwards, but Bess Landsborough saw no threatening movement of their arms nor yet any signs of a struggle.

She would have drawn Kate away from the scene, but the girl by her side suddenly wrenched herself free, and, plucking up her skirts in her hands, ran hot-foot for the northern shore.

CHAPTER XXVIII

JOHN SCARLETT COMES ASHORE

KATE'S sojourn on the island had given her back all her girlish spring of carriage and swift grace of movement. Fleet and light as a goat she sped over the short turf and threaded the sharp shark's fins of the black basaltic ridges, her eyes fixed upon the shifting groups on the shore.

Was her love lying there dead before her, or at least in utmost danger of his life? The men stood so close together, all looking inwards and downwards, that Kate was among them before any one saw her come. She cleft a way through the shouldering press, and there on the wet pebbles of the beach, dragged just a few yards from the shore on which a back-draught from the smooth glides and rattling currents of the tide-race of Suliscanna had cast him, lay the body of John Scarlett.

Kate gave a sharp cry, half of disappointment and half of relief. Her love it was not; but his friend it was. And if this were John Scarlett, where would Wat Gordon be by this time—of a surety lying deep in the green heave of some far-reaching "gloop," or battered against the cruel cliffs of the "goës," into which the surges swelled and thundered, throwing themselves in bootless assault upon the perpendicular cliffs, and fretting their pure green arches into delicatest grey lace of foam and little white cataracts

which came pouring back into the gloomy depths along every crevice and over every ledge.

John Scarlett lay with his broad chest naked and uncovered, for his coat and waistcoat had already become centres of two separate quarrels, shrill and contentious as the bickerings of sparrows over the worm which they hold by either end and threaten to rend in pieces.

Patterns of muskets and sword-blades were wrought upon the veteran's breast in a fashion which was then common to all men of adventuring—land travellers and seafarers alike. The old soldier's arms and breast were a mass of scars and cicatrices, both from his many public campaigns and from his innumerable excursions upon the field of private honour.

"This has been a man indeed," said one of the men that stood by; "many a knife has been tried on that skin, and many, I warrant, gat deeper holes and deadlier cuts then these in the making of this pretty patchwork."

"He is an enemy of the chief, that is beyond a doubt," said another; "for he is not a man of the Isles, and our Lord Murdo forbade the coming of any else. It will be safer to stick him with a gully-knife before he comes-to, lest a worse thing happen us."

And it is likely that this amiable intention might have become the finding and conclusion of the meeting, but that at that moment Kate pierced the throng and threw herself down on the salt clammy pebbles at John Scarlett's head. She put her hand upon his heart, but could not feel it beat. Before long she was reinforced by Mrs. McAlister, who arrived panting. She swept the men unceremoniously aside with her arm, and addressed them in their own tongue, in

words which carried insult and railing in the very sound of them.

The two women had not worked long at the chill, sea-tossed body of the master-at-arms before John Scarlett opened his eyes and looked about him.

"Bess Landsborough!" he said, without manifesting the least surprise, "what for did ye no' meet me at the kirk stile of Colmonel where I trysted wi' ye?"

"John Scarlett!" cried Mrs. McAlister, "I declare in the name o' a' that 's holy, Jack Scarlett, the King's Dragoon—what in the world has brocht ye here, lying bare and broadcast on the cauld stanes of Suliscanna?"

"I cam' seekin' you, Bess," said John Scarlett, easing himself up on his elbow with a grimace of pain. "I heard in Colmonel that ye had kilted your coats o' green satin and awa' wi' John Hielandman. So I e'en cam' round this gate to see if ye had tired o' him."

"And I see that, dead or alive, ye can lie as gleg as ever—certes, there never was a dragoon that was single-tongued, since Satan made the first o' that evil clan oot o' the red cinders of hell!" answered Mistress McAlister vigorously.

"Weel, Bess, it skills little," replied Scarlett, rising slowly to a sitting posture. "But if ye would prevail on these honest men to withdraw a little and not glower at my nakedness, as if they had never in their lives before cast eyes on a man that has had a wash, it is greatly grateful I will be, and forgive you that little mislippen about the tryst."

As John Scarlett turned himself about, he pressed Kate's hand sharply to intimate that he desired her to pretend complete ignorance of his person and purpose. But the fear which now had become almost a certainty, that she had seen her lover go down in the

tide-race of Suliscanna, dominated her heart. She was scarce conscious of the meeting of John Scarlett and his ancient sweetheart, but continued to gaze steadily and with straining eyes out upon the smooth and treacherous swirls of the Suck.

"Have ye a cloak or a plaid, Bess, that I may gird myself with it, and go decently to my quarters—unless these gentlemen still desire to finish me here?" asked Scarlett calmly.

Whereat the wife of Alister drew a plaid of rough brown wool from the shoulders of the man nearest to her and cast it about him. By this time Scarlett had managed to stand upon his feet, and even to walk a few steps along the pebbles of the shore. All Suliscanna was now gathered about the new-comer, and on the skirts of the crowd the minister and Alister stood apart with bent brows in anxious consultation.

"It is the chief's order!" said the minister. "We will have to answer for it with our lives, if we do not ward him safely."

"In the vaults of the tower will be the best and securest place," answered Alister.

Then, with no more words spoken, Alister McAlister stepped up to his wife and, seizing her by the arm, said, "This is chief's business—do as I bid you now!"

And Mrs. McAlister knew that the time had come for her to obey. For well as she could make the burly *dhuine wassail* do her bidding when the business was his own or hers, Bess never put her general supremacy to the test by offering resistance to her husband's will when the clan or the chief were in question.

"Tell the Lowland man," said Alister, looking his wife straight in the eyes, "that it is the order of the chief that he be warded till we hear what is to be

done with him. We did not ask him to come to Suliscanna, and we must see that he does not invite himself quietly away again now that he is here. He is to bide in the tower at our house-end, and ye can boil him Lawland brose as muckle as ever he can sup, since ye seem to be so well acquainted with his kind of folk."

When Mistress McAlister had interpreted this to John Scarlett, the old campaigner gave the brown plaid a twirl about his shoulders, and crying, "Content—lead on!" accepted the situation with a soldier's philosophy.

The ancient tower of Suliscanna, in which Scarlett presently found himself, was no extensive castle, but simply a half-ruinous blockhouse constructed for defence by some former lords of the Isle. The upper part was a mere shell in which Alister's wild goats were sometimes penned, when for some herdsman's purpose they had been collected in the vicinity of the huts by the expectation of the spare crystals of salt when the pans were drawn. But underneath there was a vaulted dungeon still strong and intact. This subterranean 'strength' possessed a door of solid wood —a rare thing in Suliscanna—brought at some remote period from the mainland; for save driftwood there is no plant thicker-stemmed than the blackberry to be found on all these outermost Islands of the Sea. This door was secured by a ponderous lock, the bolt of which ran into the stone for nearly two feet, while the wood of which it was composed was studded with great iron nails and covered with hide like a targe. It was the sole article of value which had been left in the ancient tower when my Lord's new house was built farther up the hill.

The tower stood at the summit of the first ascent

of the island, close beside the cottage of Alister McAlister—of which, indeed, very characteristically and economically it formed the gable-end. Heather bloomed close up to the door of it, and looked into the dungeon at every narrow peep-hole, so that when Scarlett set his head to one of these he found himself staring into a fairy forest of rose and green, in which the muir-fowl crouched and the grasshoppers chirred.

John Scarlett found that during the time he had been conferring with the representative of the Lord of the Small Isles and his wife Bess upon the pebbles of the beach, a bed of fragrant heather tops had been made for him by the clansmen in this arched and airy sleeping-place. Alister went in with him, glanced comprehensively around, and nodded.

"Now you will be comfortable and make yourself at home," the action said. And John Scarlett smiled back at his taciturn jailor. For indeed, except the stone seat which ran round the vault, and the new-laid bed of heather tops in the corner, the available accommodations of the Tower of Suliscanna consisted exclusively of an uneven area of hard-beaten earthen floor made visible by the light of half a dozen narrow port-holes, which looked in different directions out upon the moor and through the gable against the dark wall of Bess Landsborough's house.

Alister locked the dungeon door by turning the huge key with a spar of driftwood thrust through the head of it like the bar of a capstan. Then he called to him a shaggy gillie and bade him watch the door on the peril of his head. Whereupon the red-headed Gael grinned obediently, pulled himself an armful of heather, and effectually double-locked the door by stretching himself across the entrance with his hand on his dirk and his sword naked by his side.

CHAPTER XXIX

WAT'S ISLE OF REFUGE

BUT there were two men in the ill-fated boat when she so heedlessly rushed into the strange and dangerous outer defences of my Lord Barra's warded Isle of Suliscanna. What had become of the other?

Wat Gordon of Lochinvar was not drowned—it is hardly necessary to say so much. For had his body been lying in some eddy of the swirling waters about the outer reef of the Aoinaig narrows, this narrative of his history could not have been written. And of his life with its chequered good and bad, its fine instincts, clear intents, and halting performances, there would have been left no more than a little swarded mound in the bone-yard of dead and forgotten mariners.

When their boat overset among the whirlpools and treacherous water volcanoes of the Suck of Suliscanna, Wat Gordon had been sculling at the stern. And when the water swallowed him, pulling him down as though he had been jerked through a trap-door by the arm of some invisible giant—or, more exactly, drawn slowly under by the tentacle of the dread Kraken of these northern seas—he kept a tight grip on the oar with which he had been alternately steering and propelling the boat, as Jack Scarlett cried him his orders from the bows.

Wat Gordon had been born in the old tower of Lochinvar, in the midst of that strange, weird, far-

withdrawn moorland loch, set amid its scanty pasture-meadows of sour bent-grass and its leagues of ambient heather. As a boy he had more often gone ashore by diving from his window or paddling out from the little stone terrace than by the more legitimate method of unhooking the boat from its iron lintel and pulling himself across to the mainland. But this was a different kind of swimming, for here in the tumble and tumultuous swirl of angry waters, Wat was no more than a plaything tossed about, to be tantalised with the blue sky and the summer sea, and then again to be pulled under and smothered in the seething hiss of the Suck of Suliscanna.

Nevertheless, Wat found space to breathe occasionally, and as he was driven swiftly towards the north along the face of the great Lianacraig precipices and close under them, he clutched his oar tighter, holding it under his arms and leaning his chest upon it. So close to the land was he that he voyaged quite unseen by the watchers on the cliffs above, who supposed that he had gone down with the boat. But the current had seized him in its mid-strength, and after first sweeping him close inshore it was now hurrying him northward and westward of the isle, under the vast face of the mural precipice in which the cliffs of Lianacraig culminated. The boat had cleared itself of its mast and sail, and Wat could see that she floated, upturned indeed, but still becking and bowing safely on the humps and swirls of the fierce tidal current which swept both master and vessel along, equally derelict and at its mercy.

The whole northern aspect of the Isle of Suliscanna is stern and forbidding. Here the cliffs of Lianacraig break suddenly down to the sea in one great face of rock many hundreds of feet in height,

So precipitous are they that only the cragsmen or the gatherer of seabirds' eggs can scale their crests of serrated rock even from the south, or look down upon the little island of Fiara, the tall southern cliffs of which correspond humbly to the mightier uprising of the precipices of Lianacraig upon the larger isle. But Fiara has for ages been set in the whirl of the backwater which speeds past its greater neighbour on either side, and has taken advantage of its position to thrive upon the waste of its rival. For the tide-race of the Suck, which sets past Suliscanna with such consuming fury, sweeps its prey, snatched in anger from the cliffs and beaches of Suliscanna, and spreads it in mud and sand along the lower northern rocks of Fiara. So that this latter island, instead of frowning out grimly towards the Pole, extends green and pastoral on the other side of the deep strait and behind its frowning southward front of rocks.

At this time Fiara was wholly without inhabitant, and remained as it had come from the shaping hand of the tides and waves. And so mainly it abides to this day. The islanders of Suliscanna had indeed a few sheep and goats upon it, the increase of which they used to harvest when my Lord of Barra's factor came once a year in his boat to take his tithes of the scanty produce of their barren fortress isle.

It was, then, upon the northern shore of this islet of Fiara that Wat, exhausted with the stress and the rough, deadly horseplay of the waves, was cast ashore still grasping his oar. He landed upon a long spit of sand which stretched out at an obtuse angle into the scour of the race, forming a bar which was perpetually being added to by the tide and swept away again when the winds and the waters

fought over it their duels to the death in the time of storm.

Thus Wat Gordon found himself destitute and without helper upon this barren isle of Fiara. His companion he had seen sink beneath the waves, and he well knew that it was far out of the power of the soldier Scarlett to reach the shore by swimming. Also he had seen him entangled in the cordage of the sail. So Wat heaved a sigh for the good comrade whom he had brought away from the solvent pay-masters and the excellently complaisant landladies of Amersfort, to lay his bones for his sake upon the inhospitable shores of Suliscanna—and, what was worse, without advantage to the quest upon which they had adventured forth with so much recklessness.

Wat knew certainly that his love was upon that island of Suliscanna. For months he had carefully traced her northward. With the aid of Madcap Mehitabel he had been able to identify the spot at which the chief's boat had taken off Captain Smith's passenger, and a long series of trials and failures had at last designated Suliscanna as the only possible prison of his love.

So soon as he was certain of this he had come straight to the spot with the reckless confidence of youth, only to see his hopes shattered upon the natural defences of the isle, before ever he had a chance to encounter the other enemies whom, he doubted not, Barra had set to guard the prison of Kate of the Dark Lashes.

But even in his sad and apparently hopeless plight, the knowledge that his love was near by stimulated Wat's desire to make the best of his circumstances.

First of all he set himself the task of exploring the islet, and of discovering if there was any way by which he could reach that other island, past which he had been carried by the current of the race, and on which he hoped to find his love.

From the summit of the south-looking crags of Fiara which he ascended, he could look up at a perpendicular face of vast and gloomy cliffs. Liana-craig fronted him, solid and unbroken on either side as far as he could see. That lower part of it on which the surf fretted and the swell thundered was broken by caves and openings—none of them, save one, of any great size.

But that one made a somewhat notable exception. It was a gateway, wide and high, squarely cut in the black front of the precipice, into which one might have driven two carriages, with all their horses and attendants, abreast, and yet have left room to spare on either side. The swell which pulsed along the narrow strait between Fiara and Suliscanna, regular as the beating of a strong man's heart, was lost within its wide maw, and did not as elsewhere come pouring back again in tesselated foam, white as milk curdled in a churn. The square tunnel to which this was the imposing entrance evidently penetrated far into the rock, and communicated with some larger cavity deep within.

The rest of the isle, which had so unexpectedly become Wat's prison-house, was cut on its northerly aspect into green flats of sparse grass, terminating in sweet sickle-sweeps of yellow sand, over which the cool green luxury of the sea lapped with a gliding motion. And as Wat looked down upon them from above, he saw lights wavering and swaying over the clean-rippled floor, and could fancy that he

discerned the fishes wheeling and steering among the bent rays and wandering shadows that flickered and danced like sunshine through thick leaves.

So Wat stood a long time still upon the topmost crest of Fiara, printing its possibilities upon his heart.

Two hundred yards across the smooth, unvexed strait, which slept between its two mighty walls of rock, rose the giant cliffs of Lianacraig, with the ocean-swell passing evenly along their base from end to end—smooth, green steeps of water, dimpled everywhere into knolls and valleys. Seabirds nested up there by thousands. Guillemots sat solemnly in rows like piebald bottles of black and white. Cormorants stood on the lower skerries, shaking their wings for hours together as if they had been performing a religious rite. And here with his gorgeous beak, like a mummer's mask drawn over his ears for sport, waddled the puffin—the bird whose sad fate it is, according to the rhyme, to be for ever incapable of amorous dalliance. For have not half a dozen generations been told in rhyme how

> Tammy Norrie o' the Bass
> Canna kiss a bonny lass?

But as Wat looked for a moment away from the white-spotted, lime-washed ledges of Suliscanna to the green-fringed, sandy shores of his own island, he saw that in the water to the north which sent him off at a run. Long ere he reached the beach he had recognised the boat from which John Scarlett and he had been capsized, bobbing quietly up and down at the entrance of the bay.

The rebound or "back-spang" of the current from some hidden reef to the northward had turned the

boat aside, even as it had done Wat himself with his oar, and there the treasure was almost within his reach. Wat's clothing was still damp from his previous immersion, so that it was no sacrifice to slip it off him and swim out to the boat. Then, laying his hand on the inverted stern, he managed easily enough to push her before him to a shelving beach of sand, where presently, by the aid of a spar of driftwood, he turned her over. To his great joy he found that the little vessel was still fairly water-tight and apparently uninjured, in spite of her rough-and-tumble steeplechase with the white horses of the Suck of Suliscanna. Wat opened the lockers and saw, as he had expected, that the pistols and powder were useless. But he found, too, Scarlett's sword and his own trusty blade, together with a dagger, all of which he had the satisfaction of polishing there and then with fine sand held in the palm of his hand.

Then he swung his sword naked to his belt, and felt himself another man in an instant.

The lockers also contained a pair of hams of smoked bacon, which had suffered no damage from the water, and which, so far as sustenance went, would at least serve to tide him over a week or two should he be compelled to remain so long upon the isle.

Nevertheless, when Wat sat down to consider his position and plans, he felt that difficulties had indeed closed impenetrably upon him.

Yet he wasted no time in idle despondency. Lochinvar was of other mettle. He believed his love to be on the island close to him—it might be in the power of his enemy himself, certainly in the hands of his emissaries. John Scarlett, his trusty comrade, was equally surely lost to him. Nevertheless, while

his own life lasted, he could not cease from seeking his love, nor yet abandon the quest on which he had come.

So, using the dagger for both knife and cooking apparatus, he cut and ate a slice of the smoked bacon. Then he quenched his thirst with a long drink out of a delicious spring which sent a tiny thread of crystal trickling down the rocks towards the northern strand of Fiara.

CHAPTER XXX

WAT SWIMS THE WATER CAVERN

WHEREUPON, refreshed and invigorated, Wat proceeded to reconnoitre. He set about his inquiries with the utmost circumspection and caution, for it occurred to him that if Barra's first line of defence—that of the whirls and glides of the Suck of Suliscanna—had proved itself so effective, it was likely that he had made other dispositions equally dangerous in the event of that line being forced. Wat Gordon pushed his boat into the water and clambered on board. But he soon found that, damaged and water-logged as she was, she would move but sluggishly through the water, and must prove but little under command in any seaway. It was manifestly impossible therefore for Wat, with his single sculling oar, to venture out again into the tide-race which threshed and tore its way past the eastern side of the island.

Wat's harbour of refuge was on the northern shore, in the safest nook of the little sandy haven in which he had first brought his boat ashore. He was resolved, so soon as it should grow a little dusk, that he would endeavour to turn the angle of his small isle, and see if by any means he could find a landing-place along the western side of Suliscanna. When, therefore, the sun had dipped beneath the sea line, and the striped rose and crimson of the

higher clouds faded to grey, Wat slipped into his boat and pushed off. He guided her slowly, sculling along the inner side of the sandy reef which protected the northern bay of Fiara.

As Wat sailed farther to the west he could hear the surf hammering in the caves which look towards the Atlantic—a low, continuous growl of sound, mostly reverberating like the distant roaring of many wild beasts, but occasionally exploding with a louder boom as a full-bodied green roller from mid-ocean fairly caught the mouth of a cave, for a moment gagged and compressed the imprisoned air within it, and then sent it shooting upwards through some *creux* or gigantic blow-hole in a burst of foam and white water which rose high into the air. The wonder and solemnity of this ceaseless artillery at the hour of evening, and with the Atlantic itself lying like a sea of glass outside, impressed the landward-born Wat greatly. For he had never before dwelt in the midst of such sea-marvels, nor yet upon the shores of such a rock-bound, wave-warded prison as this inhospitable isle of Suliscanna.

The heavy boat slowly gathered way under the pressure of the broad oar-blade wielded by Wat's very vigorous young arms. And all went well while he kept the inner and protected side of the reef, but so soon as he had begun to clear the lofty cliffs of Suliscanna, and to bethink himself of attempting to cross the belt of turbid and angry waters interposed between the quiet inner haven and the cool, green lift of the ocean waves without, the boat stuck in the sand and heeled over, first with an oozy glide, and then with a sharper "rasp" as though the knife-edge of a basalt reef were masked beneath. Her head fell sharply away, and the waves coming

over the bar in brown-churned foam threatened every moment to swamp her.

Wat felt the depth of the water with his oar, and promptly leaped overboard. His feet sank dangerously into the slushy ooze of the bank, but the boat, relieved of his weight, rose buoyantly on the swell, and Wat, clasping his hands about her prow, was dragged clear, and presently, drenched and dripping for the third time that day, he found himself aboard again.

Clearly there was nothing further to be obtained by persevering in that direction, at least with a boat so unwieldy as that in which Scarlett and he had come over from the mainland. So Wat resolved to try if he could not find a smooth and safe passage by hugging the shore of Fiara, thus avoiding the sweep of the tide-race, and in the end reaching the still, deep strait lying between the rocks of his isle and the huge, lowering cliffs of Lianacraig, which so tantalisingly shut out from his view all that he wished to see of the spot on which, as he believed, his love waited for him.

Full of this thought Wat turned the prow of the boat and struck confidently along the shore, past the bay where he had first brought the derelict ashore, and on towards the projecting eastern ness of Sulis-canna. But here there was no projecting bar, and Wat promptly found himself in the same uneasy, boiling swirl which had so disastrously ended his former voyage. Nevertheless he persevered for some distance, for indeed he saw no other way of reaching the southern isle. But suddenly, not ten yards in front of his boat, appeared the turbulent, arched back of a yet more furious tide-race. The prow of the boat was snatched round in an instant;

two or three staggering blows were dealt her on the quarter as she turned tail. The oar was almost dragged from his hand, and in another moment Wat found himself floating in the smooth water at the tail of the reef, not far from where he had started. He almost laughed, so suddenly and completely had the proof been afforded him that there was no outgate east or west for a heavy craft so undermanned as his was.

It was with a heavy heart, therefore, that Wat had perforce to give up the boat as a means of reaching the southern island. After his defeat he went ashore and sat gloomily watching the pale lilac light of the evening fade from the rocks above the narrow strait. Beneath him the waters of the deep sound were still, and only beat with a pleasant, clappering sound on the rocks. A quick and desperate resolve stirred in Wat's heart.

He stripped himself of his upper clothes, and leaving all but his shirt and his knee-breeches among the rocks, he bound these upon his head, fastening them with his soldier's belt under his chin.

Then, without pausing a moment to give his resolution time to cool, he dropped into the water and swam straight across the narrow, rock-walled strait towards the black rampart line of the cliffs of Lianacraig.

He was well aware that he had taken his life in his hand, for from the side of the sea these grim crags had apparently never been scaled by human foot. But Wat had another idea than climbing in his mind. As he had watched the waves glide without sound or rebound into the great square arch which yawned in the midst of the rocky face, a belief had grown into certainty within him that the passage

must be connected with another arm of the sea at the farther side of the cliffs. With quick, characteristic resolve he determined to discover if this supposition were correct. He found no difficulty in swimming across the narrow strait of Fiara, in spite of a curious dancing undertow which now threw him almost out of the water, and anon mischievously plucked him by the feet as if to drag him bodily down to the bottom. Presently, however, he found himself close underneath the loom of the cliffs, and the great black archway, driven squarely into their centre, yawned above him.

By this time Wat's eyes had become somewhat accustomed to the darkness, and he could make out that the line where the sea met the rocks was brilliantly phosphorescent, and that this pale green glimmer penetrated for some distance into the dark of the rock-cut passage.

Wat did not hesitate a moment, but whispering "*For her sake!*" he pushed, with a full breast-stroke, straight into the midst of that sullen, brooding blackness and horror of unsteady water. Outside in the Sound he had been conscious of the brisk, changeful grip of winds fretting the water, the swift pull of currents fitful as a woman's lighter fancies, the flash of iridescent silver foam defining and yet concealing the grim cliff edges. But inside there was nothing but the blackness of darkness, made only more apparent by a pervading greenish glimmer—which, perhaps because it existed more in the eyes of the swimmer than in the actual illumination of the cavern, revealed nothing tangible, but on the contrary seemed only to render the gloom more tense and horrible.

But Wat had made up his mind and was not to

be turned aside. He would follow this sea-pass to its end—even if that end should bring death to himself. For at all hazards he was resolved to break a way to his sweetheart, if indeed she yet lived and loved him.

The silence of the cave was remarkable. Wat could feel as he swam the slow, regular pulse-beat of the outer ocean-swell which passed up beneath him, and which at each undulation heaved him some way towards the roof. But he could hear no thundering break as it arched itself on the clattering pebbles or broke on the solid rock bottom as it would have done if the cavern had come soon to an end. He oared his way therefore in silence through the midst of the darkness, keeping his place in the centre of the tunnel by instinct, and perhaps also a little by the faint glimmer of phosphorescence which pursued him through the cave.

The way seemed endless, but after a while, though the wall of rock continued to stand up on either hand, it grew perceptibly lighter overhead. Wat chanced to look downwards between his arms as he swam. A disc of light burned in the pure water beneath him. He turned on his back and glanced up, and there, at the top of an immense black cleft with perpendicular walls, lo! the stars were shining. Without knowing it he had come out of the tunnelled cavern into one of the "goës" or narrow fiords which cut into the Lianacraig fortress of basalt to its very foundations.

The passage still kept about the same width, and the water within it heaved and sighed as before, but the rock walls seemed gradually to decrease in height as Wat went on. Also the direction of the "goë" changed every minute, so that Wat had to steer his

way carefully in order to avoid striking upon the jutting, half-submerged rocks at the corners.

Presently the passage ended, and Wat came out again on a broader stretch of water, over which the free light breezes of the night played chilly. He found himself quite close to the beach of Suliscanna. There was a scent of peat-reek and cheerful human dwellings in the air—of cattle also, the acrid tang of goats, and, sweetest of all to a shipwrecked man, the indescribable kindly something by which man advertises his permanent residence to his fellows amid all the world of inhuman things.

After the darkness of the "goë" it seemed almost lucid twilight here, and Wat could see a black tower relieve itself against the sky, darker than the intense indigo padding in which the stars were set that moonless night. He stood on shore and rubbed himself briskly all over with the rough cloth of his knee-breeches before clothing himself in them. Then he donned the shirt and belt which he had brought over with him on his head by way of that perilous passage through the rocky gateway of Suliscanna, whose virgin defences had probably never been violated in such a manner before.

Being now clothed and in the dignity of his right mind, Wat cautiously directed his way upward towards the bulk of a tower which he saw loom dark above him.

CHAPTER XXXI

BESS LANDSBOROUGH'S CATECHISM

As he went his unshod feet sometimes rasped on the sharp edges of slaty rocks, and anon trod with a pleasantly tickling sensation on the shaggy bull's fell of the inland heather. Wat drew his breath instinctively shorter and more anxiously, not so much from any increased consciousness of danger as because he knew that at last he trod the isle whereon his love lay asleep, all unconscious of his living presence so near her.

Climbing steadily he surmounted the steep slope, and came to the angle of the castle wall. Here Wat peered stealthily round. A fire of peat nearly extinct smoked sulkily in front of an arched doorway which led underneath the masonry, and stretched out with his bare feet towards it, and barring all passage into the vault, lay a gigantic Highlander with a naked claymore by his side. It was Alister McAlister on guard over his prisoner.

Wat drew back. "Surely," he thought, 'it cannot be in this morose dungeon that they have shut my love?"

At the thought he grasped the dagger, which was his sole weapon, and glanced at the prostrate form of the unconscious sentinel, with the tangled locks thrown back from the broad brow.

"Never yet did Wat Gordon slay a sleeping man,"

he muttered, somewhat irresolutely, and took a backward step to consider the matter. But at that instant a thick plaid was thrown over his head and he was pulled violently to the ground. Limber Wat twisted like an eel and struck at his assailant with his dagger. But a hand clasped his arm and a voice whispered in his ear, "Down with your blade, man. I am a friend. If ye love Kate McGhie, you endanger both her life and yours by the least noise."

The plaid was unwound from about his head, and in the dim Wat could see that he stood beside the door of a cabin, so low as hardly to be distinguishable from the boulders upon the moor, being as shapelessly primitive and turf-overgrown as they. Beside him crouched a woman of middle age, apparently tall and well-featured.

"Wheest, laddie," she whispered, "hae ye the heart o' gowd that the lassie left for ye wi' that daft hempie Mehitabel Smith?"

Wat slipped the love-token from under his shirt and let the woman touch it. It was chill and damp with the crossing of the salt strait.

"Aye, lad, surely ye are the true lover, and Bess Landsborough is no' the woman to wrang ye," said the wife of Alister. "But mind ye, there are mony dangers yet to encounter. Your friend that was casten oot o' your bit boatie among the Bores o' the Suck is safe-warded yonder in the tower, and that is my man Alister that ye swithered whether to put your gully-knife intil or no."

Wat hastened to disclaim any such fell intent.

"Wi' laddie, was I no watchin' ye?" said the woman, "and did I no see the thocht in the verra crook o' your elbow? Bess Landsborough has companied ower lang wi' men o' war no' to ken when

they are playin' themselves, and when the death o' the heart rins like wildfire alang the shoother blade, doon the strong airm, and oot at the place where the fingers fasten themselves round the blue steel. Sma' blame till ye! But lest ye should be ower greatly tempted, I e'en threw the plaidie ower ye to gie ye time to consider better. For after a', Alister's my ain man, and a kind man to me. And forbye, stickin' a knife atween puir Alister's ribs wad no hae advantaged you a hair, nor yet helped ye to your bit lass—no, nor even assisted that ill-set skelum Jock Scarlett to win clear oot o' his prison hole."

The woman took Wat by the hand.

"Come this side the hoose," she said; "I want a word wi' you. Bess Landsborough is takin' some risks the nicht, and she maun ken what mainner o' lad she is pittin' her windpipe in danger for."

She drew him round the low, turf-roofed house to the end farthest from the castle. Here stood a peat stack, or rather a mound of the large surface "turves" of the country, for there are no true peat-mosses upon Suliscanna.

Alister's wife crouched upon her heels in the black shelter of the stack, and drew Wat down beside her.

"Now," she said, "what brocht ye here this night, and where did ye come frae?"

"I came seeking Kate McGhie, the lass that I have followed over a thousand miles of land and sea," answered Wat promptly, "and also to discover what had become of my friend whose name you have mentioned, John Scarlett, he who was with me when our boat overset near the island."

"To seek your lass and your friend, says you," answered the woman, "a good answer and a fair; but whilk o' them the maist? Ye are cauld and

wat. Ye will hae soomed frae some hidie-hole in the muckle cliffs they name Lianacraig, I doot na. Was it your lass or your friend that ye thocht on when ye took life in hand and cam' paddling like a pellock through the mirk? Was it for the sake o' your love or your comrade that ye were gangin' to slit the hass of Alister McAlister, decent red-headed son o' a cattle-thief that he is?"

"For both of them," said Wat stoutly; "I am much beholden to John Scarlett. He set out on this most perilous adventure over seas at a word from me, and without the smallest prospect of advantage to himself."

"I doubt it not," said Bess Landsborough; "it was the little sense o' the cuif all the days of him, that he would ever do more for his comrade than for his lass. And that is maybe the reason annexed to Bess Landsborough's being here this day, a Heelantman's wife on the cauld, plashy isle o' Suliscanna. But, laddie, listen to me. I am no gaun to let the bonny bit young thing, that I hae cherished like my ain dochter, mak' the same mistake as I made langsyne. Tell me, laddie, as God sees ye, what yin ye wad leave ahint ye, gin ye could tak' but yin o' them and ye kenned that death wad befall the ither."

"I would take Kate McGhie, though ye hanged old Jack Scarlett as high as Haman," quoth Wat instantly.

"Fairly and soothly, my man," said the woman in his ear. "There is no need to rair it as if ye were at a field-preachin' on the wilds of Friarminion. Quietly, quietly; tell me in brief what ye wad do for your friend and what for your lass?"

"For my friend I will tell you," said Wat, "though I know not what gives you the right to ask. For my

friend I would do all that a man may—face my friend's foes, help his well-wishers till I had not a rag to share, stand shoulder to shoulder with him and never ask the cause of his quarrel, share the crust and divide the stoup, die and be buried in one hole with him at the last."

"Aye," said Bess, "that is spoken like a soldier, and well spoken, too. Ye mean it, lad, and ye wad do it, too. But for your lass ——"

"For her," said Wat, lowering his voice solemnly, "for the lass I love, is it? I will rather tell you what I have done already. For her I have gone mad. I have flung my chances by handfuls into the sea. At sight of a single scornful glint of her eye I ran headlong to destruction; at a harsh word from her I had almost thrown away life and honour both. For a kindly word I have set my head in the dust under her foot. I have cherished in my deepest heart no pride, no will, no ambition that I would not have made a stepping-stone of, that her foot might tread upon it."

Wat paused for breath amid the rush of his words ere he went on:

"'I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more,'

somewhat thus runs the catch. But the man that made that kenned nothing of love. For I would make all the honour of men no more than a straw wisp to feed the flames to warm the feet of my love withal. To 'die for her' is a pretty saying, and for ever in the mouth of every prating fool whenever he comes anigh a woman; but I would smile under the torture of the boot, and bide silently the Extreme Question only to preserve her heart from a single pang."

"Would you give her up to another if you knew that it was for her good?"

"A thousand times no!" Wat was beginning furiously, when his companion put her hand over his mouth.

"If ye dinna hunker doon beside me, and learn to be still, ye will e'en see her ye think so muckle o' the bride o' my Lord o' Barra, and that too on the morn of a day when ye will be learning to dance a new quick-step oot o' the tower window up on the heuch there."

"I know," said Wat, speaking more low, and answering as if to himself her former question, "that it is within the power of the love of woman, when it is purest and noblest, to be able to give up that which they love to another, if they judge that it is for the beloved's good. But they that think such surrender to be the essence of the highest love of men ken nothing at all about the matter. For me, I would a thousand times rather clasp my love in my arms, and leap with her over the crags of Lianacraig, than see her given to any other. And I would sooner set the knife into her sweet throat with mine own hand than that Barra should so much as lay a finger upon her."

"And your friend?" said Bess Landsborough. She was smiling in the dark as if she were well pleased.

"Jack Scarlett I love," replied Wat, "but not for him did I break prison, overpass the hollow seas, and lay my life like a very little thing in the palm of a maiden's hand."

"It is well," said Bess Landsborough with a sigh, "that is the true lilt of the only love that is worth the having. The heart beats just so when there comes into it the love that contents a woman—the love that is given to but few to find in this weariful, unfriendly, self-seeking warld."

She rose to her feet and looked eastward.

"In an hour and a half at the outside ye maun be on your road, lad, back to your hidie-hole. I ask ye not where that may be. But gin Alister McAlister sleeps soundly ye shall speak with your friend—while I, Bess Landsborough, a decent married woman frae the pairish o' Colmonel, keep watch and ward at the chaumer door ower the pair o' ye."

She took him again by the hand, laid her finger a moment soberly on his lip, and then led him about the house to a low door, through which she entered and drew Wat Gordon after her, bowing his head almost to the level of his waist in the act of following his guide.

Wat was rejoiced to know that he was about to see Jack Scarlett, both because he had thought him dead in the tide-race, and also that together they might devise some plan of escape for themselves and for the delivery of Kate from her durance. At an inner door his guide halted and listened long and earnestly. The chamber in which they stood was dark save for the red ashes of a turf fire in the centre. Bess Landsborough tapped lightly on the inner door and opened it quietly. Then she took Wat by the shoulder and pushed him in.

"Ye said your 'Carritches'[1] to me, and ye said them weel, or, my faith, 'tis not here ye should have found yoursel' this nicht! Gang in there, lad, and say the 'Proofs' and the 'Reasons Annexed.'"

Wat, greatly puzzled, stepped within. He found himself in a small room, dark save when the dying fire of peat in the outer chamber threw red glimmers into it.

"Jack—Jack Scarlett?" whispered Wat, astonished that the old soldier did not greet him.

"He must be very sound asleep!" he thought.

[1] Catechism.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE SURRENDER OF THE BELOVED

BUT something in the air of the chamber struck to the heart, something different, subtle, unfamiliar, dazing. As his eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, he saw the figure of a girl lying on a couch of heather over which was thrown a rug made of the skins of wild animals. The face was turned from him, but the girl was not asleep, for he could see that quick, helpless sobs shook her frame, and that her attitude betokened the abandonment of despair. Wat Gordon's heart leaped within him and then stood still, when he realised that for the first time in his life he stood within the chamber of his love.

At the noise of the opening door the girl slowly turned her head, and her eyes fell on the figure of Wat. The young man sank on his knees a little way from the couch. The girl continued to gaze at him without speech, and as for Wat he could find no fitting words. He strove for utterance, but his tongue was dry to the roots, and the roof of his mouth parched like leather.

Presently Kate sat up with a world of wonder and fear on her face. She was wrapped about the shoulders in a great shawl of fleecy wool, such as a hundred years ago the shipwrecked mariners of the Spanish Armada had taught these northern islanders to knit. Beneath it, here and there, appeared the

white glimmer of fine linen cloth, such as could only come from the lint wheels of the Lowlands.

The girl's lips were parted, and her eyes, great and black, appeared so brilliant that the shining of them seemed to lighten all her face there in that dim place.

"Wat," she said, "you have come back to me; I knew you would, and I am not afraid. I knew you would come if you could and speak once to me. For you are mine in all worlds, and you gave your life for me. It is but a dream, I know—but ah, such a sweet dream!"

She held out her arms towards him with such wonderful pity that Wat, kneeling on the floor, could not move; and words he found none to utter, so marvellous did her speech seem to him.

"It is a dream," she repeated, in a voice full of hushed awe, "I know it. And it is a very gracious God that hath sent it to me this first night of my loss. I saw my lad go down in the deep, hurrying waters—my love, my love, and now he will never know that I loved him."

"Kate," whispered Wat hoarsely, and with a voice which he knew not for his own, "Kate, it is indeed I —myself, in the flesh. I have come to save you. I did not die. I did not drown. It is I, Wat Gordon, your own lad, come to kiss your hand, to carry you safe through a world of enemies."

The girl leaned forward and looked toward him wistfully and intently. She was shaken from head to foot with strange tremors. Love, fear, and most delicious shame strove together within her maiden's heart.

"If indeed you be Walter Gordon in the flesh, I thank the Lord for your safety. But go, for here you are in terrible danger every moment. I have

said I know not what. I was asleep, and when I awoke I saw you, and thought that I yet dreamed a dream."

Wat reached over and took her hand. He bent his head to it reverently and kissed it.

"Sweet love," he whispered, "have no fear. In a little while I shall be away. I must go from you ere the dawn comes. But your friend and mine, your hostess of the isle, brought me to this dear and sacred place, thinking me not unworthy. She waits at the door. In a little space the light will come and the island men awake. Then I must take my life in my hand and be far away before the day. But rest assured, I am at all times near enough to watch over you, my beloved."

Wat looked steadfastly and adoringly at Kate, and lo! the tears were running silently down her face and falling on the pillow. He drew a little nearer to her.

"Love," he said softly, "you have forgiven me. You forgave me long ago, did you not? I loved you over much. That was the reason. See," he whispered, pulling his gold heart from about his neck, "this is the token that you forgave me." And he bent and kissed it before putting it back again in his bosom.

She raised her eyes to his. They shone upon him with a strange light that had never been kindled in them before. The light of a great love shone out of the wonderful deeps of them, beaconing the way clear into the haven of her heart. It was the maiden's look of gladness he saw there—the joy that she had kept herself for the beloved—so that now at last she can give him all.

"Oh, Wat—dear, dear Wat," she whispered, "I love

you; I cannot choose but love you. I cannot be proud with you any more. I am so tired of being proud. For my heart has cried out for you to come to me this weary, weary while. I have been so long alone—without any one—without you."

And she made a little virginal gesture of pain which sent Wat's arms about her in a moment. He could not answer her in words.

But he was wiser, for instead their lips drew together. He kept his eyes on hers as their faces closed each on the other. His head reeled with the imagined sweetness. He seemed to remember nothing but her eyes, and how they were ocean-deep and world-large. He felt that he could plunge into them as into the sea from an over-hanging cliff.

But just ere their lips met Kate suddenly dropped her head against his breast.

"Wat!" she whispered intensely, "tell me—you heard what I said when I thought you had come to me in a dream—that—that I loved you and wanted you to return to me? You will never think less of me, never love me less for my words, nor for letting you love me thus?"

Wat Gordon laughed a low, secure, satisfied laugh deep down in his throat. He had forgotten the watchful woman at the door, the waking enemies without, the coming dawn swiftly striding towards Suliscanna from the east, the long, dangerous passage of the sea cavern, the perils innumerable that lay about them both. He loved and he held his love all securely in his arms. She questioned of his love, and he felt that he could answer her.

"My love," he whispered, "I love you so that all things—life, death, eternity—are the same to me,

Nothing weighs in the scale when set to balance you. I loved you, Kate, when I thought you must hate me for my folly and wickedness. How shall I love you now, when your sweetest words of this night are writ in fire on my heart? But all is one —I love you, and I love you, and I love you!"

The girl sighed, the satisfied sigh of one who listens to that which she desires to hear and knows that she will hear, yet who for very love's sake must needs hear it again and yet again.

And her arms also went tremblingly about him, and they twain that had been sundered so long kissed their first kiss—the kiss of surrender that comes but once, and then only to the pure and worthy. The dewy warmth and fragrance of her lips, the heady rapture of the unexpected meeting so thrilled his heart and dominated his senses, that broad day might well have stolen upon them and found the lovers so, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot."

But the voice of Bess Landsborough from the doorway caused them to start suddenly apart with a shock of loss like the snapping of a limb. Yet it was a kindly voice, and one full of infinite sympathy for those who, like Wat and Kate, were ready to count all things well lost for love.

"My lad," she said gently, "ye maun e'en be tramping. In an hour or so the sun will be keekin' ower the hills of the east, and gin ye tarry your lass will mourn a lover. There are more days than one, and nights longer than this short one of summer. Trust your love to me. Bess Landsborough chose a strange way of love hersel', but she keeps a kindly heart for young folk, and you twa silly bairnies shall not lippen to her in vain. Come your ways, lad."

And Wat would have gone at her word. For the hope of the future had possession of him, and besides, his head was dazed and moidered with the first taste of love's sweetness.

But the girl raised herself a little and held out her arms.

"Bid me good-night just this once," she said, "and tell me again that you love me."

So Wat took his sweetheart in his arms. There seemed no words that he could say which would express the thoughts of his heart at that moment.

"I love you—God knows *how* I love you!" was all that he found to say. And then, "God keep my little lass!"

There came a strange hush in his ears, and the next moment he found himself outside, breasting the cool airs of the night as if they had been the waves of the tide-race, and listening to the voice of Bess Landsborough, which carried no more meaning to his ears than if it had been the crying of a seagull rookery upon the rocks of Lianacraig.

"Come back to-night and I will meet you at the shore side," was all that disentangled itself from the meaningless turmoil of his guide's words. For the fragrance of his love's lips was yet on his, and he was wondering how long the memory of it would stay with him.

Without even waiting to take off his clothes Wat pushed out into the channel of the sea passage. He swam as easily and unconsciously as though he had been floating in some world of dreams, in which he found himself finned like a fish. And when he came to himself he was lying under the shelter of his boat in the cove of his own green islet of Fiara, trying to recall the look that he had seen in his love's eyes in

the gloom of Bess Landsborough's guest-chamber. But though he buried his head in his hands, and laid his hands on the sand to shut out the sky and the shining breakers, he could not recall the similitude of it. Only he knew that it had been most wonderful, and that his eyes had never seen anything like it before.

CHAPTER XXXIII

AN ANCIENT LOVE AFFAIR

WHEN Wat awoke on the island and stirred his cramped limbs, on which the sun had already dried his wet clothes, in the warm and briskly stirring airs of the summer morning, he could hardly believe in the reality of his experiences of the night. One by one he remembered the passage of the cave, the Highland sentinel sleeping by his dying fire, his new and kindly protector, Bess Landsborough. Then last of all, and suddenly overflowing all his heart with mighty love (even as a volcano, Askja or Vatna, pours without warning its burning streams over icy provinces), the meeting with his love in the dusky undercloud of night rushed upon his memory and filled all his soul with a swift and desperate joy.

What wonder that the sweet, low voice he had heard call him "love" out of the darkness, should in the broad common day scarce seem real to poor Wat Gordon of Lochinvar? He had passed through so many things to hear it. Also, ever since the death of Little Marie, he knew the accent of the voice that speaks, not for the sake of "making love," but which unconsciously and inevitably reveals love in every syllable.

Wat had made love in his time, and ladies of beauty and repute not a few—my Lady Wellwood among

the number—had made love to him. But he knew the difference now.

For love which must needs be "made" bears always the stamp of manufacture. True love, on the other hand, is a city set on a hill; it cannot be hid, and this is why the love-glance of a maiden's eye so eternally confutes the philosophers, and ofttimes lays the lives of the mighty, for making or marring, in the hollow of very little hands.

The day that succeeded this night adventure was a long one both for Wat and Kate. For the girl had been even less prepared for the astonishing event of the night than Wat himself. Providence, by the hand of Mistress Alister McAlister, had certainly worked strangely. Indeed, the only person wholly unmoved was that lady herself. She bustled about the flags of her kitchen, slapping them almost contemptuously with her broad bare feet, busy as a bee with her baking and brewing, like the tidy, thrifty, "eident"[1] Ayrshire goodwife that she was. Not a glance at Kate revealed that she had been instrumental in opening a new chapter in two lives only the night before.

When, midway through the forenoon, Alister brought his bulky body to the door-step, his loving wife drove him off again to the gateway of the tower with an aphorism which is held of the highest repute in the parish of Colmonel:

"Na, na, come na here for your brose—e'en get your meal o' meat where ye work your wark!"

And the stoop-shouldered giant coolly retreated without a word of protest, merely helping himself as he went out to a double handful of oatmeal from his wife's bake-board, for all the world like a theftuous

[1] Diligent.

schoolboy, who keeps the while one eye on the master. With this he took his way to the spring which trickled down by the castle wall. And there, very deliberately and philosophically, he proceeded to make himself a dish of cold "drammoch" on the smooth surface of a stone which the water had hollowed.

"And mony is the hungry mouth that would be glad of it," said he, by way of grace after meat. For Alister was of the excellent and approven opinion that a dinner of herbs by the dykeside is better than a banquet of Whitehall with the sauce of an angry woman's tongue for seasoning thereto.

But when Bess Landsborough brought the prisoner his farles of cake and cool butter-milk (for it was "kirning day"), she took out also a handful of crisp bannocks for her husband. These she thrust under his nose with the sufficient and comprehensive monosyllable, "Hae!" And Alister accepted the act as at once honourable amend and judicious apology.

Nor was Alister behindhand in courtesy. For though the silent gaoler did not utter a single word either to his wife or his prisoner, he drew his *skean dhu* and cut a whang from the sweetmilk cheese which he kept by him. To this he added a horn of strong island spirit, which of a surety proved very much to the taste of the late master-at-arms to their several Highnesses Louis, King of France, and William of Orange, Stadtholder of the Netherlands.

Thereafter, with consideration particularly delicate, he withdrew out of earshot and sat on a knoll before the castle, leaving his wife to talk at leisure to her ancient sweetheart. For Alister McAlister was a man without jealousy. He knew that he could keep his wife, even as he kept his head in battle, with the little wee point of his knife, and the broad broad

blade of his claymore. And as for ancient sweethearts, what cared he for a peck of them? Bess Landsborough might have had a score of lovers in the 'Lowlands low'; yet had she not chosen to leave them all and follow him up the braes—aye, and over the sea straits, threading the ultimate islands till at last she had come to this barren holding of rock, scantily felted down with heather and peat on the isle of Suliscanna?

But, on the other hand, Scarlett was not the man to lose his time, in spite of bonds and imprisonments.

"Ye are as weel-faured as ever, Bess. Ye were aye a bonny blithesome lass a' the days o' ye!" said he complacently, as he munched his farles of cake and took sup about of usquebaugh from the horn and butter-milk from the pail.

"Havers!" said Mistress McAlister, "ye are an auld eneuch man to ken that ye canna blaw twice in my lug wi' the same flairdies. Ye forget I hae heard ye at that job before. And it lasted—hoo lang? Just e'en till your company rade awa' frae Girvan to Kirkcudbright, and then ye took up with Maggie Nicholson, the byre-lass o' Bombie, the very second week that ever ye were there! And telled her, I daresay, that she was weel-faured, blithe, and a bonny woman!"

"I see ye haena forgotten how to belie them that ye tried to break the hearts o', Bess Landsborough," said Scarlett, without, however, letting his broken heart interfere with a very excellent appetite. "Ye weel ken that ye sent me frae the door o' the Laggan wi' my tail atween my legs like a weel-lickit messan, and twa o' your ill-set cronies lookin' on at my shaming, too."

"I 'm thinkin', my man John," retorted Bess Lands-

borough, "that ye had better say as little as ye can aboot that ploy. For the lasses were Mirren Semple o' the Auld Wa's and Meg Kennedy o' Kirriemore, that had come in the afternoon to keep me company. And as we sat talking ower ae thing after anither, we spak' amang ithers o' you, my braw trooper—Sergeant John Scarlett, no less, that rode so gallantly with the colours in his hand. And by this and that we had it made clear that ye had been for making up to a' the three o' us at once! An' so we compared your tricks. How ye had gotten doon on your knees and telled us that ye loved us best o' a' the world. Ye had kissed oor hands—at least mine and Meg Kennedy's. But your favourite fashion was to take the skirts o' oor gouns and kiss the hem o' them, swearin' that ye wad raither kiss the border o' oor cloaks than the mouth o' the grandest woman in Scotland. (A' the three o' us!) Then ye asked for a curl cut off aboon our brows—at least frae mine and Mirren Semple's. For Meg Kennedy never had sic a thing in her life, but had aye flat, greasy hair, sleekit like a mowdiewart[1] hingin' by the neck in a trap on a wat day. And her ye telled that ye couldna bide hair that wadna keep smooth, but was aye a' kinked and thrawn into devalls and curliewigs. Oh, sic a bonny, true-speakin', decent, mensefu' callant as the three o' us made ye oot to be! So when we had ye gye-and-weel through-hands, wha should ride up to the door but my gay lad himsel', this same braw cavalier. So Mirren and Meg and me, we gaed oot ontil the step and telled ye what we thocht o' ye. Ow aye, ye were a puir disjaskit cuif that day, Sergeant John Scarlett, for a' your silver spurs and your red sodjer's coat!"

John Scarlett laughed loud and long at the record

[1] Mole,

of his iniquities, but his abasement, if at the time as profound as Bess Landsborough made it out to be, had certainly completely passed away. For he cried out: "What a grand memory ye hae for the auld times, Bess! I warrant ye, ye couldna gang ower the points o' Effectual Calling as briskly, nor yet the Kings o' Judah and Israel that ye learned on the Sabbath forenichts by the lowe o' the Colmonel peats!"

"But eneuch o' havers," said Bess; "ken ye that yon braw lad o' yours is safe and hearty? Mair than that, he met wi' his bonny lass yestreen. Baith o' them kens what love is—a thing that ye never kenned, no, nor will ken to your dying day, John Scarlett."

"Aweel, aweel," replied Scarlett placably, "at ony rate I am desperate glad that Wat's won oot o' the brash o' the mony waters safe and sound; and as for love, if I kenned nocht aboot it, at least I hae had experience o' some gye fair imitations in my time, that did weel eneuch for a puir perishing mortal like me."

. . . . . .

On the other hand, Wat on his isle of Fiara had been exceedingly busy all that day. He had chosen a shallow cavern on the most remote northern shore of Fiara, dry and open like the entrance-hall of a house, and into it he had carried a large quantity of fresh and blooming heather, sufficient for the most luxurious couch in the world. This he arranged in a little sheltered alcove to the right of the main chamber, and pleased himself with the simple arrangements, talking to himself all the time.

"By this path she can go down to the sea without being observed. Into this basin I can lead the water

that trickles over the rock, so that she may wash on chill or rainy mornings."

He broke off with a quick nervous laugh at his own thoughts.

"I am speaking as if we were always to dwell together on this island. But the sooner we get away the better it will be for both of us."

Yet somehow the imagination of his heart played about this idea of the seclusion of two on the isle of Fiara. For the escape itself Wat had his plans already laid. He knew that Kate was a strong swimmer—indeed, far his own superior at the art. Once in the old days she had beaten him hollow when but a half-grown girl, swimming two miles on the broad spaces of Loch Ken without a sign of fatigue. Scarlett was a more difficult problem. For the stout soldier had always held all that concerned the water in sovereign contempt, and Wat could see no way of conveying him safely across to the northern island. Yet it was essential for their escape that he should be taken thither, and that at the same time with Kate. For the islanders might be inclined to make short work of their remaining prisoner if they found that the maid, so straitly committed to their charge, had been spirited away.

So before committing himself for the second time to the strange watergate which led to his beloved, Wat had all the details of his plot arranged. He resolved to make the attempt on the first night when the new moon should be far enough advanced to throw a faint light over the water and temper the darkness of the rock passage. He could construct of driftwood a raft large enough to carry those necessaries with which Bess Landsborough could furnish him out of her scanty stores without attracting

attention. The raft would also be at least a partial support for Scarlett. Wat resolved to arrange the method of escape with Bess that very night, and obtain from her the cord before returning. When Wat emerged from the long passage it was perfectly dark. Not even a single star was to be seen. More than once had he scraped himself painfully on the concealed rocks and on the sides of the cavern; upon which he grumbled to himself as even a man in love will do, for he knew that he would feel these hurts very much more acutely on the morrow.

"This will not do at all for Scarlett, though Kate might manage well enough by keeping close to my shoulder," he said, shaking his head, which dripped with the salt water, for the first break across the sound to the archway had been through a pretty briskly-running jabble of spray.

But when Wat came out on the sea-front of Sulis-canna he saw an unusual sight. Torches thronged in single file down the pathways. They flashed and crowded about the landing-place, passing and repassing each other. A boatload of men was just disembarking in the nearer bay; while yet another was dropping down the slack of the ebb, coming from the south of the island and striking in for the shore exactly at the proper moment, like men who knew every turn of the currents.

Wat could hear the clatter of many voices.

Swimming silently and showing no more than the dark thatch of his hair over the water, he approached nearer. He might have been a seal for all the mark he made on the water.

As the torches gathered thicker about the landing-place, Wat could see the flash of arms as one gentleman and another disembarked. Presently a figure

in black stepped ashore, and was greeted with a loud shout of welcome and acclaim by the islanders. Wat's heart sank within him, for he recognised his arch-enemy, and he knew that the difficulties of his task would now be infinitely increased. For my Lord of Barra it was indeed, who had at last come to claim his captive. And there behind him, like a hulking lubber-fiend, strode the burly, battered figure of Haxo the Bull, with the Calf and the Killer in close attendance.

CHAPTER XXXIV

CAPTOR AND CAPTIVE

NEVERTHELESS, such a panoply is love, that Wat's heart did not fail him. He waited till the flare of torches and the tumult of men's voices had withdrawn up the hill, over which my Lord of Barra took his way to the house which he occupied during his infrequent visits to the island—a rude strength of stone consisting merely of three or four chambers which had been built after the castle on the rocks below had fallen into disrepair.

Wat swam ashore, keeping well to the right of the landing-place where two or three men were still busied about the boats, securing them with ropes, and getting out what bits of property had been left in them. Wat could not but feel a cold chill strike through his heart when he remembered that the possession of these boats by the islanders, together with their perfect knowledge of all the different states of the tide, would render his position upon the islet of Fiara infinitely more dangerous.

"All the more reason," quoth undaunted Wat, "for us to make the attempt this very night."

So, keeping as before to the short heather above the paths, he made his way silently upward toward Scarlett's dungeon and the dwelling of his love.

He found Bess Landsborough eagerly waiting for him. She dragged him sharply away from the cottages.

"Gang back," she whispered, shaking him almost roughly, as though he were to blame; "ken ye not that the chief has come and there will no' be a sober man on the island this nicht? Even my Alister, if he were to come across ye before morning, would think no more of sticking a knife in ye than of breaking the back of a foumart[1] with a muckle stane."

"I know that," said Wat with composure, "and that is the reason why I am going to take both Kate and Scarlett with me to-night."

"The laddie's fair raving," said the woman; "the thing's clean impossible. It canna be dune. Ye will hae to wait—some nicht when they are a' sleepin', maybe."

"I'm not going back alive without Kate McGhie," said Wat. "I cannot leave her with the cruel ravisher, Murdo of Barra——"

"Hoot, laddie," said Bess, "the chief will no' do the lassie ony harm. He's ben the hoose wi' her the noo."

Wat, who had been crouching behind a rock beside Bess Landsborough, at once sprang up and took his dagger bare in his hand. He was setting off in the direction of the hut with the intention of breaking in upon the colloquy of captive and captor, when Bess sprang on him and pulled him down with all the weight of her body about his neck and exerting the utmost strength of her brawny arms.

"Deil's in the laddie! He gangs aff like a spunk o' pooder laid on a peat. The laird's but talkin' wi' the lass in the kitchen, wi' my man Alister sittin' on the dresser, and half the rascaldom o' the Low Countries (well are they designate!) waiting at the door. A word or twa will do your lass little harm,

[1] Weasel.

unless she is o' the weak mind, and my lord can persuade her to marry him by the guile of his tongue."

Wat grunted contemptuously. This was the last thing he was afraid of.

"I want," he said, "whatever arms ye can furnish me with, some food of any portable sort—and a rope."

"Save us, laddie!" said Bess, holding up her hands; "ye might just as lief ask me this nicht for the Earldom of Barra."

"I must have them," said Wat firmly, "if I have to forage for them myself."

"Aweel, I can but do my best," said the woman from Colmonel, resignedly; "but I kenna where I shall get them."

Very cautiously they made their way back to the cottage of Alister.

"Wheesht!" said Bess; "lie cowered behind that stone. They are on their road away. For this nicht surely your lass will be left at peace."

"And after that it will not matter," said Wat, looking cautiously over the edge of the boulder, "for either we will be safe out of this evil isle, or else she and I will be where Barra and his devils can trouble us no more."

When Bess and Wat reached the dwelling of the son of Alister, they found it fallen strangely silent and dark. Bess went in boldly and promptly. Presently her voice was heard in high debate, and after a pause her husband, as if driven with ignominy from his own house, stumbled past Wat, and began clambering like a cat up the steep rock to the castle dungeon as easily as if he had been walking on a grass meadow by a water-side.

No sooner was he safe out of the way than the door of the hut opened circumspectly.

"Here!" said the mistress of the dwelling in a far-reaching whisper.

Wat went up to the doorstep. Bess Landsborough put out a hand, guided him through the murky intricacies of her outer room, and pushed him into that in which he had met his love the evening before.

Kate was sitting fully dressed on her bed with her head in her hands. She looked up with a sharp little cry as he entered.

"Kate," he whispered, "it is I—Wat."

Whereat she ran to him with a sob of relief that was very sweet to hear, and nestled with her head on his broad shoulder.

"Oh, thank God you have come! All will now be well."

Wat did not feel so sure of that, but nevertheless, he caressed the clustering curls and held his love to his bosom, murmuring little meaningless words which Kate felt were better to listen to than much wisdom.

Presently Bess Landsborough brought Wat a pair of pistols, a double flask of powder, and a bag full of bullets.

"We must see about getting John Scarlett out of his prison," she said. "I have the victuals all ready. There is a rope behind the dyke at the corner that looks to the sea. But ye had better get John Scarlett out first, and then ye can all three lend a hand at the carrying—save us! What's that?"

Bess Landsborough sprang sharply out of the inner room to the door which gave upon the moor.

"Hide ye, Wat Gordon," she said; "here comes some one to visit us."

Kate made Wat lie down between the compacted heather of her couch and the outer wall of the hut. Then she threw a coverlet deftly over him. Wat

grasped his dagger bare in his right hand to be ready in any emergency, but his left found a way almost of its own accord through the heather, till in the darkness it rested in Kate's as she sat on the edge of the bed.

"My Lord of Barra," they heard Bess Landsborough say without, "have ye forgotten aught? We thought you gone to repose yourself after your journey."

"Go find your husband and bring him hither, mistress!" commanded the stern voice of Barra.

"It's no' very like that Bess will gang far frae hame to seek her man, or ony ither man; there's mair than eneuch men in Bess's hoose this nicht!" said Mistress McAlister under her breath. But with apparent obedience she went out—only, however, to ensconce herself immediately behind the door. She wanted, she said to herself, to "see their twa backs oot o' the kitchen without bloodshed."

Barra advanced boldly to the inner door which opened into Kate's chamber. He paused a moment and knocked lightly. The girl sat still and silent, but her hand gripped that of Wat closer to her side with a quick, instinctive thrill, which made that very true lover clutch his dagger and curse the man that could so wring with terror his sweet maid's heart.

"May I have a moment's private audience with you, Mistress Kate?" said Barra from the outer room.

Kate did not answer a word.

The master of the island swung back the door and revealed his tall, slender figure, in his usual dress of simple black, standing in the doorway of the outer room. He stooped his head and entered as he did so. The girl instinctively moved a little nearer to Wat and clasped his hand more firmly. A little

stifled cry escaped her. Wat cleared his dagger-hilt and made ready to spring upon his enemy. My Lord of Barra in all his chequered life had never been nearer death than he was at that moment. For Wat Gordon was deciding exactly where he would strike his first blow.

"I did not come again hither to alarm you," said Barra, "but that I might more fully vindicate myself alone with you, than I could do in the presence of so many witnesses. That which I have done—your transporting from Holland and your seclusion here—I have done with full warrant and justification, not hastily nor yet without due authority."

"I know of no authority," said Kate at last, speaking firmly, "which could warrant the seizure of a maid who never harmed or offended you, the carrying her off gagged and bound like a felon, sailing with her to another country, and there interning her upon a lonely isle till it should please you to come for her like a gaoler to a captive."

"My lady," said Barra, not without a certain respect in his voice, "I am well aware that I cannot expect you to take my word, for the circumstances are not ripe for me to tell you all. But I ask you to believe that neither disrespect nor passion, nor yet any selfish jealousy, prompted me to these so strange expedients. But on the contrary, a genuine desire for your happiness, and the direct request of those most deeply interested and intimately connected with you."

"And who may they be?" asked Kate, looking at him contemptuously; "I know none who have the right to give you leave to carry off a young maid from her friends at dead of night, with as little ceremony or mercy as Reynard does a grey goose out of the farmer's yard."

"Your father and your mother—are not they authority enough?" answered Barra.

The girl gazed at him in cold disdain.

"My father," she said, "never in his life crossed my will by word or deed. It was indeed by his permission and with his help that I went to Holland. And as for my mother, she has been dead and in her resting-grave these twenty years!"

"Nevertheless I had the permission and encouragement of the noble lady, your mother, in that which I have done, though I admit that of your father was a little more belated. That is what I wanted to say. You do not believe me, I am aware, and I am not able at present more particularly to unriddle the mystery. Nevertheless, rest assured that a Lord of Barra does not lie. I bid you good-night. Is it permitted to kiss your hand? Well, then, with all humble duty and observance, I kiss mine to you."

With that Barra bowed and went out backwards through the narrow door, as if he had been ushering himself out of a queen's presence-chamber.

In the kitchen he passed Bess Landsborough, who opened on him with a voluble tale of how she had sought her husband high and low without any success, and how it was to be supposed that, like the rest, he had gone to drink his Lordship's health at the muckle house over the hill.

But Barra went by her without a word, and the mistress of Alister McAlister was left speaking to the empty air. She suddenly ceased as he disappeared in the dark, and turned for sympathy to Wat and Kate in the inner room.

"Siccan manners!" she said indignantly; "they wadna set a Colmonel brood-sow—to gae by a decent woman like that muckle dirt, and yin, too, that had

just gane on an errand for him. It 's true I gaed nae farther than the back o' the door, but at ony rate he kenned nae better, and cam' back wi' news for his high michty chiefship. It 's fair scandalous, that 's what it is! Wha hae we here this shot? I declare my hoose is as thrang as a sacrament scailing, when the folk are flocking to the drinking-booths at Stanykirk holy fair."

The visitor on this occasion proved to be her husband Alister. He was already somewhat flushed of cheek and wild of eye.

He paused unsteadily in the middle of the kitchen and flung down a great key on the table.

"Take care of that till the morn's morn," he said. "I would maybe loss it. I am going out to drink till I be drunk."

And with this simple declaration of policy he strode out as he had come.

As soon as he had gone, Bess threw a damp turf over the clear peat fire on the hearth of the outer kitchen, which in a trice raised a dense smoke and rendered everything within dark and gloomy.

"Come awa'," she said, putting her head into the room where Kate, her heart beating wildly with the joy of reprieve and the presence of her beloved, was clinging to Wat's arm, as he stood on the floor with his dagger still ready and bare in his hand. "Haste ye and come away," she said; "there 'll be time and to spare when ye get him safe to yourself, my lass, for a hale world o' cuikin' and joein'."

Wat and Kate came out quickly and Bess shut the door behind them. Outside the sharp air off the Atlantic chilled them like a drench of well-water on a summer's day, breathing keenly into their lungs after the close atmosphere of the hut.

They made their way up the steep to the castle. Across the door of the vault where John Scarlett was confined, lay the prostrate body of a Celt, inert and stertorous.

Mistress McAlister stirred him with her foot, and then turned him completely over.

"As I thocht," she said, "it is just Misfortunate Colin. It will be an ill day for him the morn. But he is aye in the way o' mischances onyway. He canna keep clear o' them. If a stane were to slip frae a rock tap in a' the isle, it is on Colin it wad light. If a rope break at the egg-harvest, 'tis Colin that 's at the end o' the tow. I think a pity o' him, too—for barrin' the drink and the ill-luck, he 's a decent soul. But it juist canna be helpit."

So with that Bess undid the door with the key which Alister had thrown upon the table, and then carefully tucked it into the waist-belt of Colin the Misfortunate.

"It 's a peety," she said; "but after a' it is a deal mair faceable and natural that the like o' this should hae happened to Colin than to ony ither man in the isle."

Jack Scarlett lay on his bed of heather tops, wrapped in his plaid, and slept the sleep of the easy of conscience.

"What 's a' the tirrivee?"[1] he growled, when Wat shook him. "Get up and escape—what 's the terrible fyke and hurry? Disturbin' a man in his first sleep. Surely ye could either hae comed afore he fell ower or let him hae his sleep oot. A man's health is afore a'thing when it comes to my time o' life. And it is no havers and nonsense—far frae 't! But ye hae no consideration, Wat Gordon—never had, ever since I kenned ye."

[1] Unnecessary disturbance.

So growling and grumbling as was his wont, old Jack gathered his belongings together with soldierly practicality, pocketing the remains of his evening's meal, and bringing all sorts of treasures out of numberless hiding-places here and there about his dungeon.

"Now I am at your service," he said, as he stood erect.

CHAPTER XXXV

SKIRTING THE BREAKERS

As the party filed out of the low dungeon door each of them of necessity stepped over the prostrate body of Misfortunate Colin. The fates that sport with destiny had offered him up a sacrifice to the wrath of his chief, in order that luckier men might go scatheless.

"It micht just as weel hae been Alister, my man!" said Bess; "for he will be as drunk as the lave, or maybe a kennin waur! But then Alister has been a fortunate man a' his days—no' like that puir tyke there that never supped meal porridge but he choked himsel' wi' the spoon!"

It was a night clear and infinite with stars when the four, Kate, Wat, Scarlett, and Bess, took up each their share of the arms and provisions, which the last named had provided in the shelter of the dyke. The air was still. There was no sound save the ceaseless soughing whisper of the mighty salt river as it rushed northward past the isle—the strange pervading sound of the Suck gurgling afar like the boiling of a pot. Only at intervals and from a distance came the shouting of choruses and the loud "*Hooch!*" of some reveller yet in the active stages of drinking long life and prosperity to the returned chieftain.

As soon as they had passed the ridge and left the village behind them, Wat paused for a consultation.

"'Tis little use," he said, "to think of making a raft at this time of night. Yet certain it is that we must be clear of the isle by the morning—that is, if one of us is to remain alive."

"I for ane am gaun to bide on Suliscanna!" said Mistress McAlister.

"There is but one way that I can think of," continued Wat, not heeding her; "there are two boats at the landing-place. I saw the men unloading them when I landed to-night. Now we could not take the larger of these into the tide-race, but if the tide be favourable we might seize the smaller and pilot it through the sea-cavern by which I came hither, to my hiding-place on the Isle of Fiara."

Jack Scarlett nodded silent assent as he listened to Wat's suggestion. The night air had restored all his confidence, and he felt ready for anything. So on the darksome ridge overlooking the landing-place the two women were left to consume their souls with impatience, while Wat and Scarlett, with their daggers in their hands, stole stealthily down to effect their desperate capture.

The boats lay together on the inner side of a little stone breakwater. They were not drawn up on the beach, but secured stem and stern with ropes, and floated in the gentle undulation of the tide. Wat and Scarlett strained their eyes into the darkness for a sight of any watch. But spite of the stars, the night was too impenetrable for them to distinguish the presence of any human being on board.

Wat dropped into the water, having left his powder and shot, together with the pistols, in the care of Scarlett. He swam a few strokes out to the boat and listened. In the larger he could clearly distinguish the breathing of two men. The other appeared to

be entirely empty. Promptly Wat cut the cord which secured the stem, and let that boat fall away and swing round with her head towards the shore. Then beckoning Scarlett, whose figure he could discern black against the sand of the beach, Wat stepped on board. Scarcely was he over the side when his foot trod on the soft body of a man. Wat was on him in a moment and had the fellow by the throat. But the helpless gurgle of his respiration and the pervading smell of Hollands which disentangled itself from every part of his person, convinced Wat that he had nothing to fear from the crew of this boat.

There remained the other and larger, which was anchored farther out in the water of the little harbour. Cautiously Wat lifted the small double-pronged anchor, which still held their first prize. Scarlett waded in and was helped over the side. The tide swept them slowly round towards the larger vessel in which Wat had heard the breathing of men. Presently their boat went groaning and wheezing against the side planks of her companion. Wat promptly and silently secured his position with the five-pronged boat-anchor which he had kept beside him for the purpose.

Scarlett and he were on board in a moment, and Wat found himself in the heat of a combat with a man who struck at him with a bar of iron as he came over the side. But the striker's companion did not move to his assistance, and with Wat's hand at his throat and Scarlett's knee on his breast, resistance was very brief indeed. A lantern was burning inside a small coil of ropes. This Wat folded in the cloak with which the sleepy-headed watch had been covering themselves in the bottom of the boat, and let a ray of its light fall on the faces of his captives. Both were known to him. They were the Calf and the

Killer, the two inevitable scoundrels of Haxo the Bull's retinue.

"What shall we do with these fellows?" said Wat, looking up disgustedly.

"Sink them with the boat," said Scarlett promptly.

Wat shook his head. They lay so still and they looked so helpless—even the Killer, who had struck at Wat, was now resting his head on the thwart in perfect unconsciousness.

"We must get the drunken scoundrels ashore somehow," said Wat.

"We will tie them together with the rope, turn them over the side, and haul them ashore with the slack," said Scarlett, "and if it chance to break, why, so much the better." Without another word the master-at-arms set to work, packing the Calf and the Killer together as if they had been a couple of trussed chickens, exploring their pockets for plunder as he did so.

"Let the poor rascals' wallets alone, Jack!" cried Wat indignantly.

"Nay, lad," quoth Scarlett, with imperturbable philosophy, possessing himself as he spoke of a clasp-knife and a flagon of strong waters, "the art of forage and requisition from the enemy is of the very essence of war, as the great Condé used often to say."

Presently Scarlett paid out the spare rope to Wat, who took it ashore with him. The bodies dropped without a splash into the water, and Wat, aided by the current, soon brought them to land, and hauled them out of the water on to the pebbles. Then came Scarlett with a couple of balls of tow for plugging seams, which he thrust with gusto into their mouths.

"That will keep things safe," he said. "I trust

neither of these good gentlemen is afflicted with a cold in his head, or else he might be liable to choke, and so find himself in warmer and drier quarters at his awaking!"

But the Calf and the Killer lay like brothers in each other's arms, breathing gently and equably.

There remained but the man on the first and smaller boat. Wat climbed back to him. He had not stirred. Then Lochinvar let a single ray of the Killer's lantern fall on his face. He whistled softly at what he saw, and beckoned Scarlett. It was none other than Wise Jan Pettigrew, who lay there overcome by the potency of the spirits supplied by the Chief of Suliscanna.

Wat now went back to the women. He found them where they had been left, and Kate hurried forward.

"You are not hurt, Wat?" she said anxiously, taking him by the hand, "nor Scarlett?"

"No," said Wat; "but we must hasten to the boats. We have taken them both safely."

So the two women accompanied him down to the harbour. Scarlett had meanwhile been getting all the useful cargo out of the larger boat, and by this time he had it piled up promiscuously about the unconscious body of Wise Jan.

Before Kate went aboard the elder woman clung to her and kissed her in the darkness.

"My lassie, are ye feared?"

"Feared?" said Kate; "why should I be afraid; am I not all his? I would not be feared to go to the world's end with him."

Bess Landsborough sighed as if that did not greatly improve the case, but she only said: "God keep you, my lassie, and let me see you soon again. I declare

ye hae grown to be the very light o' my e'en ever since I took ye first to my arms in the cabin o' the *Sea Unicorn*."

It was the plan of Wat and Scarlett to take both boats as far out to sea as possible, to scuttle one there, and then to make trial of the dangerous passage of the sea-cave with the smaller and more easily handled vessel.

The tide was now on the strong ebb, and there was a smart swirl of current setting through the narrow entrance of the harbour. Wat cut the rope of the larger boat which alone secured her to the shore.

"God in Heaven bless you, good friend of ours!" said Wat, stooping to kiss the rough brave woman who had so loyally helped them, "till we can all be happy together in our own country."

"Na," she said, "fare ye weel for ever; I hae to bide by Alister, my man. I shall see your faces nae mair. O, my bairn, my bairn!"

And the heartsome, snell-tongued, tender woman turned away with the tears falling fast upon the bosom of her gown.

Wat pushed off in the smaller boat, with the larger towing behind, and, being empty, standing much higher out of the water. The current caught them. The next moment the hiss of the ebb under their counter sank to silence. The talking sound of the ripples along their sides ceased. The boats were going out with the tide, and Wat had nothing to do but sit and guide them.

It was wonderful how clear it was outside, even a short distance away from the loom of the land. They kept close in to the shore, and at first the ebb seemed to favour them, for they made way rapidly, drifting towards the mouth of the goë by which they must

enter the water-cavern, and attempt that dangerous passage through to the Isle of Fiara.

By keeping close in-shore they found themselves in a sort of canal of deep water, at least fifty feet across, beyond which the tide and the underlying rocks strove together on the edge of the Suck, throwing up short foam-crested waves as on a sandbar.

Wat was now about to attempt a dangerous feat. It was manifestly impossible that they could tow the larger boat through the narrows of the goë. And yet to leave it on the beach was simply to put facilities for pursuit into the hands of men inflamed to the highest degree by the thought of revenge and the anger of their chief, as well as perfectly acquainted with every state of the tide and at home in the swirl of the multitudinous currents.

Wat had resolved to destroy the larger boat on the edge of the tide-race, so that even if she did not sink at once she would be carried far past the island of Suliscanna. He therefore put the skiff in which he and Scarlett were rowing boldly in the direction of the broken water of the tide-race. He well knew the danger, yet for the sake of their future safety on Fiara he resolved to risk it.

The tide fairly thundered as it tore northward, and when they drew near to it time and again Scarlett glanced apprehensively over his shoulder. A thin, misty drizzle of spray as from a waterfall began to fall on their faces. Right ahead of them appeared the foam-flecked back of the Suck, like a river in spate rushing out into the smooth waters of a lake. They could see the breakers ahead of them flashing palely white in the starlight, and hear the bullers crying aloud to each other along the shore.

Suddenly Wat stopped rowing.

"Back-water, Jack!" he cried. "I am going into the big boat astern to scuttle her. Hand me the mallet. I must loosen that Portsmouth sea-lawyer." This was a long cross-headed plug which stopped up a hole in the boat's bottom, and which commonly was concealed from sight by the planks covering the bilge at the stern.

Two blows were sufficient to make the "Portsmouth lawyer" quit his grip. The plug had apparently only been adjusted that day, and had indeed never been properly driven home. But Wat was not content with this. He seized the axe which he found on board, and drove it vigorously through the planking of the sides, low down below the water-line, till the salt water came bubbling up. Then he hauled in the rope by which the boat was attached to the lighter skiff in which Kate and Scarlett sat. As the prow of the scuttled boat touched the stern of the other, Wat stepped on board with the hatchet in his hand. Then with a sharply trenchant "chip" he severed the tow-rope, and the doomed boat instantly fell away towards the white line of the breakers which they had so perilously skirted.

CHAPTER XXXVI

PASSAGE PERILOUS

"Now let us get out of this," said Scarlett, who had grown palpably uneasy. "One cooling experience of the Suck of Suliscanna is enough for me."

Their smaller boat came about just in time. They could see the derelict snatched like a feather and whirled away by the rush of imperious water. The noise of the roaring of the Suck became almost deafening. To seaward they still caught glimpses of their late consort, rolling this way and that amid numberless jets and hillocks of sparkling and phosphorescent water. Now she ascended with a dancing motion. Anon the fountains of the deep boiled and hissed and curled over her as she lumbered on to her doom. Then as she gradually took in water, she lurched more and more heavily, till at last they saw her stern stand black against the sky, for a moment shutting out the stars, as she filled and sank.

"Handsomely done!—Now straight for the entrance of the water-cave, and ho for the Isle of Fiara!" cried Wat, who began with every stroke to feel himself drawing clear of the multiplied dangers of the night. Yet the most difficult part of the passage was still to come.

All the while Kate sat silent and watchful in the stern. Wat and Scarlett were at the oars. Scarlett used the unconscious Jan for an excellent stretcher as

he laid himself to his work. So strong was the north current even there, that they had to pull hard for a moment or two lest they should be carried past the goë which formed the entrance to the water-cavern through which they must pass to their city of refuge.

"There!" at last cried Wat, indicating the dark break in the cliff-line with a certain pride, as they came almost level with the mouth of the passage, and saw vast sombre walls rising solemnly on either side of that black lane of sea-water, sown with phosphorescent sparks, which stretched before them.

Presently they were shut within, as it had been by the turning of a wrist. The stars went out above. The waters slept. The air was still as in a chamber. The soughing roar of the Suck of Suliscanna died down to a whisper and then was heard no more.

"Stand up, Jack, and paddle for your life!" commanded Wat. He had often enough crossed Loch Ken in this manner, after having read Captain John Smith's Adventures in Virginia with profit and pleasure.

"'Fore the prince!" cried Scarlett indignantly; "I had just learned one way of it, sitting with my nose to the rear-guard, which as soon as I can make shift to do without the oar taking me in the stomach—lo, I am sharply turned about and bidden begin all over again with my face to the line of advance!"

"Stop talking—get up and do it!" cried Wat impatiently; "grumble when we get through. This is no sham fight on the common of Amersfort with the white-capped young frows sitting on benches at their knitting."

Obediently Scarlett rose, grasped his oar short in his hands, and imitated as best he could in the darkness Wat's long sweeping stroke past the side of the

boat, as he stood and conned the passage from the stem.

The tunnel seemed long to Wat, who had formerly swum it swiftly enough with thoughts of Kate singing in his head. The dark dripping walls on either side of them stretched on interminably. Ever a denser dark seemed to envelope them. The gloom and weight of rocks above them shut them in. They had dived, as it seemed, into the very earth-bowels as soon as ever the boat swam noiselessly into the arched blackness of the water-cavern.

"Now take your oar by the middle and stand by to push off if we come too near to the rocks on either side," commanded Wat from the prow.

"Aye, aye, sir," cried Scarlett, taking good-humouredly the sailor's tone, and using words he had heard on his sea voyages. "Belay the binnacle and part the ship's periwig abaft the mainmast!"

He muttered the last part of the sentence below his breath, and Wat, who straddled in the narrow angle of the stem, peering eagerly ahead and paddling to either side, was far too anxious to give heed.

Suddenly the boat bumped heavily on a hidden obstacle. Scarlett went forward over a thwart and his oar fell overboard, and doubtless the latter would have floated away but for Kate's ready hand, which rescued it and brought it aboard, dripping sea-water from blade to handle.

"Let me help," she said; "I can see very well in the dark."

"Agreed," answered Scarlett, with infinite relief. "Old Jack is noways fond of butting at his enemies with a steering-oar in a rabbit-hole."

So he took Kate's place in the stern, while the girl stood erect and picked the words of command from

Wat—sometimes even venturing to advise him when with her more delicate perceptions she felt, more than saw, that they were approaching the shadowy-green phosphorescent glimmer where the water floor met the walls of the cave.

No sooner had they struck than a cloud of sea-fowl flew out about them, their wings beating in their faces, and the birds themselves stunning them with deafening cries. But presently, with protesting calls and roopy whistlings, the evicted inhabitants settled back again to their roosting-places.

As they went on the boat began to feel the incoming heave of the outer swell. A new freshness, too, came to them in the air which blew over the low island of Fiara straight into the great archway out of which they were presently floating.

So with Wat and his sweetheart standing erect paddling the boat, they passed out of the rock-fast gloom into the heartsome clatter of the narrow Sound of Fiara. On either side of it the cliffs rose measurelessly above them, and Fiara itself was a blue-black ridge before them. But Wat had crossed the strait too often to have any fear, so bidding Kate sit down, he settled the oars in the rowlocks to cross the stronger current to be expected there.

Presently, and without further difficulty, they came to the little indentations in the rock, almost like rudely-cut steps, where Wat had slipped into the water to swim across when first he made his venture towards Suliscanna.

"Here we will disembark the stores," said he.

And Scarlett was safely put ashore to receive them as Wat handed them out, while Kate held the boat firmly with the boat-hook to the side of the little natural pier. Then the still unconscious Jan was

tossed behind a boulder to sleep off his strong waters, with as scant ceremony as if he had been a bale of goods.

"Now, Kate," said Wat when all had been landed.

The girl took Scarlett's hand and lightly leaped ashore. Her eyes served her better in the dark than those of either of the men.

But a new danger occurred to Wat.

"We cannot leave the boat here," he said; "it might be driven away, or, what is worse, spied from the top of the tall rocks of Lianacraig. Listen, Scarlett. I am going to paddle it across to the cave, anchor it out there in a safe place, and swim back. I shall not be away many minutes. Look to Kate till I return."

"Better say 'Kate, look to old blind Jack!'" muttered Scarlett. "He is good for nought in this condemnable dark but to stumble broadcast and bark his poor bones. But I 'll take my regimental oath the lass sees like a marauding grimalkin at midnight."

Wat was half-way across the strait or thereby by the time Scarlett had finished, and again the darkness of the great rock-shaft swallowed him up. Being arrived within the archway, he searched about for a recess wide enough to let the boat swing at her stem and stern anchors without knocking her sides against the rock. He was some time in finding one, but at last a fortunate essay to the left of the entrance conducted him into a little land-locked dock just large enough for his purpose. Here he concealed and made fast his prize before once more slipping into the water to return to the island of Fiara. Wat swam back with a glad and thankful heart. He had now brought both his sweetheart and his friend to the isle of safety—safety which for the time at least was complete. He had a vessel

on either side of his domains, and the enemy on the larger island possessed no boat which would enable them to reach his place of shelter—that is, supposing them as ignorant as the Suliscanna islanders of the wondrous rock-passage underneath Lianacraig. Truly he had much reason to be proud of his night's work.

Kate was standing ready to give him her hand as he drew himself out of the water upon the rocks. He could see her slender figure dark against the primrose flush of the morn. But he wasted no time either in love-making or salutations. They must have all their stores carried over the southern beach by day-break, and safely housed from wind and weather in the rocky hall where Wat had arranged the couch of heather tops.

So without a word Kate and Wat loaded themselves happily and contentedly with the gifts of their late kind hostess—a bag of meal, home-cured hams, a cheese, together with stores of powder and shot for their pistols. They could see the figure of the master-at-arms stumbling on in front of them, and could hear, borne faintly back on the breeze, the sound of his steady grumbling.

Wat and Kate smiled at each other through the dusk, and the kindred feeling and its mutual recognition cheered them. The night had been anxious enough, but now the morning was coming and they could look on each other's faces. So they plodded on as practically and placidly as if they had been co-workers of an ancient partnership, sharers of one task, yoke-fellows driving the same plough-coulter through the same furrow.

When they had arrived at the northern side of the island, Wat showed his companions where to stow the goods in the large open hall of rock, at the

sheltered end of which he had arranged Kate's sleeping-chamber. The place was not indeed a cave, but only a large opening in an old sea cliff, which had been left high and dry by the gradual accumulation of the sand and mud brought down by the tide-race of the Suck. The entrance was completely concealed by the birches and rowan bushes which grew up around it and projected over it at every angle, their bright green leaves and reddening berries showing pleasantly against the dark of the interior.

Wat immediately started off again to make one final trip, to see that nothing had been left at the southern landing-place. Finding nothing, he came back much elated so thoroughly to have carried through his purposes in the space of a summer's night, and at last to have both Kate and Scarlett safe with him on the Isle of Fiara.

As for Wise Jan, he was left to sleep in peace behind the boulder by the landing-place till his scattered senses should return.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE ISLE OF BLISS

UNDER the double shelter of the great cliffs of Lianacraig and the lower, but more effectual, barrier of the ridge which runs across the little island of Fiara in the direction of its greatest length, Wat and his love abode for a season in great peace. Scarlett accepted the situation with the trained alacrity of a soldier of fortune. He built camp-fires of the drift-wood of the shore, allowing the smoke to dissipate itself along the walls of the cliffs upon dark nights, and using only charred and smokeless wood on the smaller cooking-fires of the day.

He also took Wise Jan under his sway and rigid governance, so that, very much to his own surprise, that youth found himself continually running here and there at the word of command, as unquestioningly as if he had been a recruit of a newly-formed regiment under the drastic treatment of the famous master-at-arms.

At first Kate felt the strangeness of being left upon a lonely island with none of her own sex to speak to or give her countenance. But she was a girl of many experiences in a world which was then specially hard and cruel to lonely women.

While yet a child she had seen houses invaded by rude soldiery. She had fled from conventicle with the clatter of hoofs and the call of trumpet telling of the

deadly pursuit behind her. Even the manner of her capture and her confinement on this distant isle told a plain tale of suffering endured and experience gained. Hers had been, largely by her own choice, no sheltered life passed in the bieldy howe of common things. She had met sorrow and difficulty before, face to face, eye to eye, and was ready so to encounter them again.

But to be on the island of Fiara in daily contact with her lover, to gain momentarily in knowledge of her own affection, to feel the bonds which bound her to this one man continually strengthen, were some of the new experiences of these halcyon days.

Wat and Kate walked much under the shelter of that wall of rocks which stood a hundred yards back from the sandy northern shore of the island. Here they were screened from observation in every direction save towards the north, and that way the sea was clear to the Pole. Blue and lonely it spread before them, the waves coming glittering and balancing in from the regions of ice and mist, as sunnily and invitingly as though they had been the billows of the Pacific arching themselves in thunder upon a strand of coral.

Here the two walked at morn and even, discussing among other things their loves, their former happenings, the strange ways of Providence, most of all their future—which, indeed, looked dark enough at the present, but which, nevertheless, shone for them with a rosy glow of hope and youth. There are no aspirants more sure of success than the young who, strong in the permanence of mutual affection, take hands and look towards the rising sun. All happens to those who know how to wait, especially if they have the necessary time before them. If they be young the multitude of the coming years beckons them onward,

and so their hearts be true and worthy, the very stars in their courses will fight for them. The hatreds and prejudices which oppose them lose their edge; their opponents, being of those that go down the slope to the dark archway of death, pass away within and are seen no more. But the young true lovers remain. And lo! in a moment there is nothing before them but the plain way to walk in—the sweetness of a morning still young, a morning without clouds, the sweeter for the night and the long and weary way they have come together, hand in loving hand.

"Kate," said Wat, "tell me when you first knew that you loved me?"

They were walking on the sand, across which the evening shadows were beginning to lengthen over the intricate maze of ripple-marks, and when each whorled worm-casting was gathering a little pool of blue shadow on its eastern side.

The girl clasped her hands behind her back and gazed abstractedly away to the sun-setting, her shapely head turned a little aside as though she were listening to the voice of her own heart, and hearing its answer too keenly to dare give it vent in words.

"I think," said she at last, very slowly—"I think I began to love you on the night when I saw you first, after I had come across the seas to Holland."

"What!" cried Lochinvar, astonished at her answer; "but then you were more hard and cruel to me than ever—would not even hear me speak, and sent me away unsatisfied and most unhappy."

Kate gave Wat a glance which said for a sufficient answer, had he possessed the wit to read it: "I was a woman and so afraid of my own heart—you a man, and therefore could not help revealing yours."

"It was then," she answered aloud, "that I first felt

in my own breast the danger of loving you. That made me afraid—yes, much afraid."

"And why were you afraid, dear love?" Wat questioned softly.

"Because in love a woman has to think for herself, and for him who loves her also. She sees further on. Difficulties loom larger to her. They close in upon her soul and fright her. Then also she has to watch within, lest—lest——"

Here the girl stopped and gazed away pensively to the north. She did not finish her sentence.

"Lest what, Kate?" urged Wat softly, eager for the ending of her confession, for the revelation of the maiden's heart was sweet to him.

"Lest her own heart betray her and open its gates to the enemy," she answered, very low.

She walked on more sharply for a space. She was still thinking, and Wat had the sense not to interrupt her meditation.

"Yet the chief matter of her thought," she went on, "the thought of the girl who is wooed and is in danger of loving, is only to keep the castle so long—and then, when she is sure that the right besieger blows the horn without the gate, she leaps up with joy to draw the bolts of the doors, to fling them wide open, to strike the flag that waves aloft. Then, right glad at heart, she runs to meet her lord in the gateway, with the keys of her life in her hands."

She turned herself suddenly about with a lovely expression of trust in her eyes, and impulsively held out both her own hands.

"Take them," she said, "my lord!"

And Wat Gordon took the girl's hands in his, and falling on his knee he kissed them very tenderly and reverently.

Then he rose, and keeping her left hand still in his right, they walked along silently for a time into the sunset, their eyes wet because of the sound of their hearts crying each to each, and the shining of love glowing richer than the rose of the west on their faces.

It was Wat who spoke first.

"Love," he said, "you will never change when the days darken? You will stand firm when you hear me spoken against, when you cannot thus hearken to my voice pleading with you, when there is none to speak well of me?"

"My lad, was it not then that I loved you most," she replied, very gently, "when men spoke evil things in my ears, and told me how that you were unworthy, unknightly, untrue? Was it not even then that my heart cried out louder than ever, 'I will believe my king before them all—before the hearing of my friend's ears, the seeing of my mother's eyes, before the sworn word on the tongue of my father?'"

"Ah love," said Wat, "it is sweet, greatly sweet, to listen to the speaking of your heart."

And well might he say it, for it was, indeed, a lovely thing to hear the throb of faith run rippling through her voice like the sap of the spring through the quickening forest trees.

"But," he added, with quickly returning melancholy, "doubtless there are dark days before us, of which, however, we now know the worst. Will my Kate be sufficient for these things? We have heard what Barra says—bewitched by what cantrip I know not; but certain it seems that your father hath ta'en him a new wife, and she hath so worked on his spirit that he would now deliver you to our enemy over there, on the isle from which I took you. Suppose that all things went against us, Kate, and that I was never more than a

wanderer and an outcast; suppose your father ordered, your friends compelled, your own heart told you tales of our love's hopelessness, or others carried to you evil things of me—would you be strong enough to keep faith, Kate, to hold my hand firmly as you do now, and having done all, still be able to stand?"

The girl looked at her lover a little sadly while he was speaking, as if he had, indeed, a far road to travel ere he could win to the inmost secret of a girl's heart.

"Wat Gordon," she said, "know you not that there is but one kind of love? There are not two. The love of the wanton that grasps and takes only is no love—but light-o'-love. The love that flinches back into shelter because the wind blows is not love; nor yet that which hides itself, afraid when the lift darkens or when the thunder broods and the bolt of heaven is hurled."

There came a kind of awful sweetness on his love's face as she stood looking up at him, which made Wat Gordon tremble in his turn. By his doubts he had jangled the deepest chords of a heart. He stood in the presence of things mightier than he had dreamed of. Yet his fear was natural. He knew himself to be true as God is true. But then he had everything to gain—this woman who held his hand all things to lose, everything to endure.

Kate went on, for strong words were stirring in her heart, and the mystery of a mighty love brooded over the troubled waters of her soul like the mystery of the seven stars in God's right hand.

"But one kind of love," she said in a low, hushed voice, which Wat had to incline his ear to catch. And there came also a crooning rhythm into her utterance, as if she were inspired and spake prophecies. "How says the Writing? 'Love suffereth long and is kind.'

So at least the preachers expound it. There is no self in love. Self dies and is buried as soon as soul has looked into soul through the windows of the eyes, as soon as heart has throbbed against naked heart, and life been taken into life. Dead and buried is Self, and over his head the true lovers set up a gravestone, with the inscription: 'Love seeketh not her own—is not easily provoked—thinketh no evil.'"

"Oh love," groaned Wat, "if I could but believe it! But all things are so grievously against me. I can only bid you wait, and after all there may be but an exile's fate to share with you, a barren unfruitful lordship; while there are those, great and powerful, who could set the coronet on your brow."

The girl let his hand drop. She stood looking a long while to sea-ward. Then with sudden, quick resolve, she turned and faced him. She lifted her hands and laid them on his shoulders, keeping him at the full stretch of her arms so that she might look deep down into his heart.

"I am not angry with you, Wat," she said, softly and slowly, "though I might be. Why will you let me fight this battle alone? Why must I have faith for both of us? Surely in time you will understand and believe. Hear me, true lad," she put her hands a little farther over his shoulders and moved an inch nearer him; "you make me say things that shame me. But what can I do? I only tell you what I would be proud to tell all the world, if it stood about us now, as it shall stand on the great Day of Judgment. I would rather drink the drop and bite the crust by the wayside with you, Wat Gordon; rather be an outcast woman among the godless gipsy-folk with you—aye, without either matron's ring to clasp my finger or maiden's snood to bind my hair—than

be a king's wife and sit on a throne with princesses about me for my tire-women."

She had brought her face nearer to his as she spoke, white and drawn with her love and its expression. Now when she had finished she held him for a moment fixed with her eyes, as it were nailing the truth she had spoken to his very soul. Then swiftly changing her mood, she dropped her arms from his shoulders and moved away along the beach.

Wat hastened after her and walked beside her, watching her. He strove more than once to take her hand, but she kept it almost petulantly away from him. The tears were running down her cheeks silently and steadily. Her underlip was quivering. The girl who had been brave for two, now shook like a leaf. They came to the corner of the inland cliff of Fiara, which had gradually withdrawn itself farther and farther up the beach, as the tide-race swept more and more sand along the northern front of the inland. A rowan-tree grew out of a cleft. Its trunk projected some feet horizontally before it turned upward. Kate leaned against it and buried her face in her hands.

Wat stood close beside her, longing with all his nature to touch her, to comfort her; but something held him back. He felt within him that caressing was not her mood.

"Hearken, sweet love," he said beseechingly, clasping his hands over each other in an agony of helpless desire; "I also have something to say to you."

"Oh, you should not have done it," she said, looking at him through her streaming tears; "you ought not to have let me say it. You should have believed without needing me to tell you. But now I have told you, I shall never be my own again; and some day

you will think that I have been too fond, too sudden——"

"Kate," said Wat, all himself again at her words, and coming masterfully forward to take her by the wrists. He knelt on one knee before her, holding her in his turn, almost paining her by the intensity of his grasp. "Kate, you shall listen to me. You blame me wrongly; I have not indeed, to-day, told you of *my* faith, of *my* devotion, of the certainty of *my* standing firm through all the darkness that is to come. And I will tell you why."

"Yes," said the girl, a little breathlessly; "tell me why."

"Because," said Wat, looking straight at her, "you never doubted these things even once. You knew me better, aye, even when you flouted me, set me back, treated me as a child, even when others spoke to you of my lightness, told you of my sins and wrong-doings. I defy you, Kate McGhie," he continued, his voice rising—"I defy you to say that there ever was a moment when you honestly doubted my love, when you ever dreamed that I could love any but you, so much as an instant when the thought that I might forget or be false to you had a lodgment in your heart. Kate, I leave it to yourself to say."

This is the generous uncandour which touches good women to the heart. For Wat was not answering the real accusation she had brought against him—that he had not believed her, but had continued to doubt her in the face of her truest words and most speaking actions.

"Ah, Wat," she said, surrendering at once, "forgive me. It is true. I did not ever doubt you."

She smiled at him a moment through her tears.

"I knew all too well that you loved me—silly lad,"

she said; "I saw in your eyes what you thought before you ever told me—and even now I have to prompt you to sweet speeches, dear Sir Snail!"

At this encouragement Wat would gladly have drawn her closer to him, but the girl began to walk back towards their heather-grown shelter.

"Yet I care not," she said. "After all, 'tis a great thing to get one's follies over in youth. And you are my folly, lad—a grievous one, it is true, but nevertheless one that now I could ill do without. Nay," she went on, seeing him at this point ready to encroach, "not that to-night, Wat. All is said that needs to be said. Let us return."

And so they walked soberly and silently to the wide-halled chamber recessed in the ancient sea-cliff. Kate paused ere they entered, and held her face up with a world of sweet surrender in it for Wat to kiss at his will.

"Dear love," she said softly, "I beseech you do not distrust me any more. By this and by this, know that I am all your own. Once you made me say it. Now of mine own will I do it."

She spoke the last words shyly; then swiftly, as one that takes great courage on the edge of flight:

"Bend down your ear, laddie," she said, and paused while one might count a score.

Wat listened keenly, afraid that his own heart should beat too loud for him to catch every precious word.

"I love you so that I would gladly die to give you perfect happiness even for a day," she whispered.

And she vanished within, without so much as bidding him good-night.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

MISFORTUNATE COLIN

THE completeness of the peace and content which reigned on Fiara was only equalled by the fierceness of the storm of passion and hellish anger which broke over Suliscanna on the day after the chief's arrival. It was already late in the forenoon when a messenger, haggard and half blind with terror and the dying out of the drink in his brain, brought to the house of the chief the news of the destruction of the boats and the flight of the prisoners.

Barra rose to his feet. His hand instinctively groped for a dagger, and not finding it, he struck the man to the ground with his clenched fist. During the night he had probably been the only sober man on the island. When he went out he found a pale and terror-stricken population. Women peered anxiously at him from their hovels or scudded among the scattered boulders on the hill, with children tagging wearily after them and clinging to their skirts.

As he came near the landing-place a woman skirled suddenly from the back of a rock. The wild voice startled him. It was like the crying of the death-keen.

"Who is that?" demanded Barra of his nearest henchman.

"'Tis the wife of the watchman Misfortunate Colin," replied Alister McAlister, who this morning had some-

how accomplished the gravity of a judge on circuit. He had been all night in attendance outside the chief's door—so that, although he had carried out his declared intentions to the letter, he was yet wholly guiltless of the damning negligence which the Lord of Barra was now about to investigate and punish.

Presently the Calf and the Killer were discovered, sleeping the sleep of the greatly intoxicated. They still lay with Wat's rope about them, clasped in fraternal arms, their breaths combining to make one generous steam of Hollands gin. Misfortunate Colin lay as he had fallen, with the keys of the dungeon tucked under his belt. The chief turned him over with his foot.

"Nail him up to that door by the hands and feet!" he ordered briefly, looking at the man with cold, malevolent eyes.

A woman's shriek rang out, and like a mænad she came flying down the hill, loose-haired, wild-eyed, and flung herself down, grovelling bestially at Barra's feet.

"Mercy, master of life and death," she cried, clasping him firmly by the knees; "all misfortunes fall on my man. And this is not his fault. All the island was even as he is."

"But all the island had not the charge of a prisoner," cried Barra.

Then without further question men approached to seize the man of fated fortunes, and he would doubtless have been immediately crucified on the door which he had failed to guard but for the interference of Mistress McAlister.

She came fearlessly forth from her adjacent dwelling, clad in her decent white cap and apron, looking snod and wise-like as if she had been going to the

Kirk of Colmonel on a sacrament Sabbath. Even as Barra looked at her he was recalled to himself. To him she represented that civilisation from which he had so recently come, and which looked askance on the wild vengeances that were expected and even thought proper among the clansmen of Suliscanna.

"My lord," she said, "there was one man lang syne that was crucified with nails for the sins of the people. Be kinder to poor Colin. Tie him up with ropes, lest his blood be on your head, and ye win not within the mercy of the Crucified."

Now though when abroad he made a pretence of religious fervour for political purposes, in reality Barra was purely pagan and cared nothing for Bess's parable. Nevertheless, he acknowledged tacitly the force of an outside civilisation and another code of justice, speaking to him in the person of the woman from Ayrshire.

"Tie him up with ropes," he commanded abruptly.

And so in a trice the Misfortunate Colin was secured to the door of the dungeon of which he had proved himself so inefficient a guard, his arms fixed by the wrists to the corners of it, and his heavy, drunken head rolling loosely from side to side upon his breast. His wife knelt at his feet, but without daring so much as to touch him with a finger. Round his neck swung the keys, the emblem of his broken trust. As for the Calf and the Killer, they were flung, bound as they were, into the dungeon, where upon awaking their seeming fraternal amity suddenly gave way, and they bit and butted at each other to the extent of their bonds with mutual recriminations and accusations of treachery.

Barra surveyed carefully every trace which had been left of the manner of the prisoners' escape. But

for the present, at least, he could come to no conclusion, save that they had escaped in a boat, probably with the help of Wise Jan. He judged also that, thanks to this excellent navigator, the fugitives were by this time far beyond the reach of his present vengeance. Nevertheless he left nothing untried. He climbed the heights of Lianacraig and looked out seaward and northward. But he could see nothing upon the black ridge of the central cliffs of Fiara, and nothing in the gloomy strait which separated it from the opposite rock-wall of Suliscanna. All in that direction was warded by the race of the Suck, ridging dangerously on either side and tailing away to the north in a jabble of confused water.

. . . . . .

Meanwhile, upon Fiara Wise Jan ran his errands and gathered his driftwood under the orders of the master-at-arms, while Wat and Kate, content to dwell together in an innocent garden of Eden, a garden from which the serpent was for the moment excluded, walked hand in hand under the shelter of the long central cliff-line of the isle on which they had found shelter. The history of their love's growth was a constant marvel to them, and their chief interest and happiness now lay in unravelling the why and the wherefore of each incident in their pasts. How at such a time one thought this—how at such another they both thought the same identical thing—though one was interned in a Dutch prison and the other tossing on the waters of the North Sea. Now that they were fully assured as to their mutual loves—for even Wat had ceased to doubt, if not to marvel—they had time and to spare for the comparison of their feelings in the past, and for the most exhaustive examination of their possibilities in the future.

"Tell me a tale," commanded Kate, as they sat together on the projecting part of the trunk of the rowan-tree set in the angle of the cliff.

"Which tale?" asked Wat promptly, as if there were only two in the world—as indeed there were, for them. Kate sighed at the impossibility of having both at once—the wondrous tale of their past, and the yet more wondrous and aureate tale of their future.

"Tell me how you first loved me, and when, and why, and how much?" she said, since perforce she had to choose one.

Then Wat, delving always further and further into the past, produced instance after instance to prove that ever since he had seen her, known her, hearkened to her voice, there had not been a moment when he had not loved her.

And Kate, resting the dusky tangle of her soft curls on his shoulder, sighed again and again with a nestling bliss to listen to tale so sweet.

"You have forgotten about what you thought coming up the stairs in Zaandpoort Street," she would correct. For she knew the track of the story-teller by heart, and like a child with a favourite fairy tale, she resented omissions almost as much as she suspected the genuineness of additions.

"Now tell me more about seeing me lying on Maisie's lap with hands clasped behind my head. And about what you thought then."

And so most innocently she would put her hands in the very position it was Wat's duty to describe, which naturally for some moments disturbed his ideas and interfered with the continuity of the history.

But as soon as they turned homeward they became, after their manner, severely practical.

"Kate," said Wat, as they walked together—Wat's hand mostly on his sweetheart's shoulder, after the manner of schoolboys that are comrades—"'tis high time we were taking thought for our escape. Each day makes the coming of the ship to carry off Barra and his retinue a nearer possibility."

Kate sighed as she looked on the long barrier of the northern breakers whitening the horizon, and then at the mellow floods of peaceful light which poured in from the west, where the seabirds were circling and diving.

"And leave all this," she said wistfully; "and you!"

"Nay, no need to leave me—if you will stay with me," quoth Wat cheerfully; "but to come with me to mine own land, to be my love and my queen."

"And what would you do with me there?" she said, looking up at him. "Would not you be an outlaw, and I no better than an encumbrance while you remain in hiding?"

"I think not that the pursuit is so keen as it was before the King began to protect those of his own religion," answered Wat. "I believe we should find that the worst of the shower had slacked. And then there is always the old tower in the middle of the Loch. Since my mother's death no one has dwelt in it. We would be sure of a shelter there."

Kate shook her head wistfully, like one with the same desires but better knowledge.

"Wat, my dear," she made him answer, "you speak by the heart, and it is my heart also, God knows; but now I must speak a word or two by the head. You and I must e'en bide a wee and wait. It is better so. I will not be a charge on you. If I am not welcome at home, why, there is always sweet Grizel McCulloch at the Ardwell to whom I can go. She will gladly

give me a hiding-place and a bite for company's sake till the blast goes by. If all speak the truth in Holland where we come from, it will not be long ere the King has filled up the measure of his folly."

"In that case I might have to fight for the fool and his folly both," said Wat quietly.

"Aye, there it is," cried Kate; "a lass in her heart cares nought for king or prince when once she has given herself to love. But a man will hold to his own way of it, and put in peril his happiness and the happiness of another in order to have the right shade of colour set upon the cushions of the throne."

Wat smiled at her yet more gently.

"In Holland," he said, "I fought for the Prince and was true to him; but it is another matter here, where we are under the rule and sway of the anointed King of the ancient Scottish name."

"Ah, well, Wat," said Kate, "that is not my thought of it, as well you know. But I do not love you so little, lad, that I could think the less of you for standing by your colours, even though with your own eyes ye have seen that King make of Scotland little better than a hunting-field."

"James Stuart is my king as surely as Kate McGhie is my love," said Wat, mighty gravely. "I argue as little about one as the other."

Kate touched his arm gently.

"Dear love—no," she said. "Do not let us dispute any more. You are you, and so you love me true. You shall fight for what king you will, only keep safe your heart and life for me—for they are all I have."

They had reached the great chamber in the cliff which lay open to the north, and in which Jack Scarlett already had his cooking-fire of charcoal alight for the evening meal. A hundred yards from the entrance

there met them a sweet and appetising smell of fresh sea fish broiling in the ashes. For Wise Jan lay most of his spare time fishing out on a jutting rock, where the swirl of the Suck sent a back-spang of current careering anglewise along the northern edge of the Fiara.

"Jack," said Wat as they came in, "I think that we should get away from the island as soon as we can."

"And has it taken you all this time to come to that conclusion?" cried old Jack, without looking up, plowtering discontentedly in the red embers with a burned stick.

"The new moon will now give us nearly three hours' light — enough for our purpose," said Wat, "and Wise Jan here can help us to put our old boat in readiness."

"Why not the new and brave one you hid in the water-passage? I suppose it is there in safety still?" said Scarlett.

"Aye," replied Wat, "but unless you want to be cast away the second time in the tumble of the Suck, you will most carefully leave that boat alone. For the current races by at either end; and except for those who have spent their lives in piloting their way through the intricate passages of the reefs and know their every glide and swirl, it is impossible to reach the open sea from the Sound of Suliscanna."

"How then?" grumbled Scarlett, for these things of the sea were not in his province, and he resented the reference of any question to him. "Let those that stomach cold salt water agree about the road over it. My parish begins when there is solid earth beneath my feet."

Wat answered him clearly, scoring the points on his fingers as he made them.

"First we have the old boat, which on my first coming hither I found floating in the northern bay and brought ashore. Well, we must get Jan to rig her with the mast out of the larger boat in the water-cave, and equip her with the oars out of that also. Then, since the Suck sweeps past us on the east, and there is a strong tide-race to the west, we must steer our way directly out from the northern shore of Fiara, which is indeed the only direction in which the sea is anyway clear. We shall keep steadily on till we find the waters to the east calm and practicable, for the fretting of the tide on the shoreward skerries cannot last long out on the open sea."

Scarlett nodded his head. It was all right, he thought. He was ready to adventure in any direction which did not involve another wrestle with the unfriendly and unwholesome Suck of Suliscanna.

"This very night," quoth Wat, to close the discussion, "will I swim over and bring back the needful things for our departure in the boat itself. It is a pity indeed that we cannot take her with us."

Kate looked at him with wonderful changeful eyes, a lingering regard that dwelt tenderly on him. She said nothing with her tongue, but her eyes spoke for her. They were of the tenderest brown immediately about the dark pupils, then of a clear hazel which merged into the most sweet and translucent grey, like the first dawn of a May morning.

"Take care of yourself for me," they said; "you are all my earthly treasure."

For this is the universal language of loving women's eyes in times of danger, ever since Eve clave to her husband in the night solace outside the wall of Paradise, and they twain became one flesh.

CHAPTER XXXIX

SATAN SPIES OUT PARADISE

As he had expected, Wat found the boat safely anchored in its rocky haven, where the water lay dead and still as in a tank. He drew himself on board, dripping salt water all over the inside from his lithe body and scanty clothing. He was busying himself loosening the oars and mast, which had been tied along the side, when he heard, faintly but unmistakably, the sound of a human voice speaking.

At first Wat, busy with his work, paid no heed. He supposed it must be Scarlett talking to Wise Jan, and idly wondered why he spoke so loud. But in a moment he remembered that the rocks of Fiara and the deep Sound lay between him and his companions.

Yet quite clearly and continuously some one was certainly speaking, and at no great distance either. As before, the cave was not quite dark, for the moon had risen, and the boat lay close by the entrance which gave upon the Sound. Wat hastened to climb up on one of the rocky walls which formed the edge of the tiny haven in which the vessel floated. The water-way which constituted the floor of the cave slept black beneath, a long, almost invisible heave passing up from without, which was just the great Atlantic Sea breathing in its sleep. But so smooth were these undulations that hardly a swish on the

projections of the walls told of their passage. Outwards from where Wat stood the great lane of water gradually brightened to the huge square of the sea-door. Inwards it grew blacker and more gloomy, till the young man's eye could not trace it farther into the solemn bosom of the rock. It was out of this inner gloom that the voice was proceeding.

Presently the single voice became two, and Wat could hear the words of one speaker, who spoke low and almost delicately, and then of another who more gruffly and briefly replied. From the darkness of the inner cavern a new sound was borne to Wat's ear—the panting of men in exertion, and the little splash made by the swimmer as he changes position, or when a wavelet, running diagonally, laps against his breast. It is an unmistakable sound, and yet it is no louder than the plunge of a leaping fish that falls back again into the water.

Wat lay motionless on his ledge. He had lifted the moorings from the stern of the boat in the rock basin behind him, and he could hear that she had swung round and that her timbers were rasping gently against the stone pier. Wat prayed that the swimmers might not hear the noise. The uneasy water pavement of the cavern swayed beneath him with measured undulations, glimmering with that pale phosphorescence which is the deceiving ghost of true illumination. Yet it was light enough for Wat to observe the heads of the men who swam, as they emerged into its glow out of the perfect darkness of the inner cave.

There was one who led, swimming a good half dozen strokes in advance of the others.

"We cannot be far from the north gate now, surely," said a voice, which Wat instantly recognised

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as that of Barra, "if the *cailleach* hath told the truth and her man did really find his way to the island of Fiara by this passage."

The man who swam in the middle of the three who followed Barra only grunted in reply. Wat could see the shapeless round of his head but dimly ; nevertheless, he knew that it was the featureless, scarred visage of Haxo the Bull which glared like a Death's Head above the water in the wake of his arch-enemy. And he had no doubt that on either side of him swam the Calf and the Killer, the other members of that noble trinity.

The heads on the water grew smaller and blacker as they passed him, and the men swam on towards the outer entrance of the cave. Presently they came underneath the great span of the arch. Wat could see Barra drag himself out of the water and clamber on a rocky point which jutted out into the Sound. The three followers lifted themselves after him, and sank on the rocks in attitudes of fatigue. But Barra stood erect, his slim figure so black against the dim moonlight without that he might have been wearing his court suit of sable velvet, although actually he was naked to the waist.

So there on the pinnacle he stood, gazing silently on the sleeping Isle of Fiara, even as Satan might have gazed (so Wat Gordon thought) on the garden —close to that first delicious Paradise in which all unconscious Adam wandered with his Eve.

Long he stood thus, fixed in contemplation, revolving evilest thoughts and intents, his three attendant fiends crouched behind him in a shapeless mass upon the dark rocks, none of them daring to interrupt his musings.

Then quite abruptly Barra descended and plunged

once more into the water. Lochinvar in his turn stood erect and made ready to follow him, for he feared that his enemies were about to cross the Sound and attack on the instant the little company waiting his own return under the cliffs of the northern shore.

But he heard Barra say, "It is enough for to-night. Let us return to the harbour. The *cailleach* spoke the truth."

Then without further speech between them, the four men swam past him and disappeared, faint wreathings and smears of phosphorescence trailing after them out of the gloom into which they had vanished.

Wat drew a long breath as they were lost to sight. He knew that he had been assisting at one of the last scenes in Barra's complete and minute exploration of the isle—every cave and passage, every entrance to and outgate from it. It was just such an undertaking as he might have expected from a man so resolute as Barra, with a retinue as desperate as Haxo the Bull, his Calf and his Killer.

Now, indeed, he was aware that there was no time to be lost in getting away from this Isle of Fiara, which had brought him so many happy hours. Adam knew that the spoiler had looked upon his demi-Paradise, and that Eve herself was in danger.

Wat waited a while before he dared to bring out the boat and row across the Sound to the place where Scarlett and Kate were waiting for him. He found Scarlett philosophically seated with his back against a rock, but Kate moved uneasily about upon the shore, clasping her hands in great anxiety.

"O Wat," she said, "my dear, my dear, I thought some ill chance had befallen you. Well-nigh had I come to seek you, but for your command to bide with Scarlett."

"And it is indeed well, Kate," he answered, smiling a little, "that you were thus mindful of my words."

Then Wat told them all that he had seen and heard, till even Scarlett was impressed by the imminence of their needs. So without delaying a moment the three took such burdens as they could carry, and set out to cross the ridge of Fiara to the place where Wise Jan Pettigrew waited beside their first boat with everything ready to push off. But before they left the boat which Wat had brought out of the water-cavern, Wat bade Scarlett help him to load her with stones from the beach.

With a mallet he knocked out the plug under the stern-seat, and, as before, sunk her in mid-channel. Then he swam ashore, and followed Kate and Scarlett over to the northern side of the island.

The moon was just dipping below the horizon when, with Kate in the stern and Wise Jan handling the boat to a marvel, they left the beautiful island behind them.

Kate drew in a long breath, and her hand rested a moment on Wat's in the darkness. It was the isle of her first assurance and her dawning happiness. No place could ever be quite the same to her. There it lay, Fiara the Isle of Bliss, looming grey against the dark, solemn, bird-haunted front of Lianacraig. Should she ever see it more? There was the dear rowan-tree at the angle of the wall where they had so often sat, and there was the sweet sickle-sweep of white sand by which they had so often walked. A little farther over the dusk and sleeping Sound was Suliscanna, on which stood Bess Landsborough's house, and that smoky inner room where her love had first taken her to his heart, coming to her like a vision out of the night.

But to all Kate's questionings there came back no answer save the hoarse threatening growl of the Suck of Suliscanna arching itself angrily to the right, the gentle flap of the small sheet above, and the talking clatter of the wavelets below the stem as they glided away out into the night.

Behind them the surf was roaring on the rocks which, like the black fins of sharks, jutted, toothed and threatening, from the tail-end of the Suck of Suliscanna. There came also a chill sough of wind from the west, and with it, rising as it were from the ocean depths, the dead sea-mist, which swelled and eddied about the boat of our four travellers. Presently the bright reflection of the stars on the crest of each coming wave, as Wat lay in the stem and watched, dimmed itself. The twinkling rays were shorn. Their diffused sparkling first dulled to a point, and then became extinguished altogether as the voyagers were enveloped in the grey uncanny smother.

It was their first touch of ill-luck. Since Wat and Scarlett had left Holland on their quest, save for their shipwreck all had gone well with them. But now, on the verge of success, they were caught by the sea-mist, and in that place of dangerous currents and deadly rocks they had to submit to be carried they knew not where, nor yet into what unseen dangers of the deep. Wise Jan set his hand high over the side, and the sea-fog ran visibly through his fingers like water in a mill-race. Evidently they were moving fast in some direction, and the current was carrying them swiftly and strongly onward without their being able to alter or amend their destination.

Wat went astern and sat beside Kate. Wise Jan had taken down the sail. It was useless to them till they could see in what direction they were being

carried. Scarlett grumbled steadily and inarticulately amidships; but Wat and Kate sat with their hands locked in each other's, silent all through the night.

The morn came slowly. The salt, steamy vapour rolled and swirled about them, brightening and darkening with alternate threat and promise—both, however, equally illusive.

It was broad day when the lift of heaven suddenly cleared. The sun looked slantways in upon them, opening a way into the heart of the mist, like a rapier thrust by a master's wrist. The clouds dispersed before the clear shining, as though it needed but that single stab to prick the airy bladder of their pretension. The wreaths of vapour trailed themselves away, breaking into steamy garlands and flat patches with scalloped edges as they went. The blue sky stooped over on either side and hooked itself permanently on to the blue sea-floor.

And lo! there they were at the south end of Suliscanna, and there was the schooner *Sea Unicorn* just coming out from her anchorage under full sail within two hundred yards of them.

It was no use to row or to set the sail. Our three were so taken with deadly apprehension that they sat quite still as the vessel approached. The captain hailed them from his station by the helm, but neither Wat nor Scarlett had the heart to reply. A boat was lowered, and in a few moments Wat and Kate were being received on board the *Sea Unicorn* of Poole, by Captain Smith, her owner and master.

And there before them, as they looked across the deck from the side up which they had come, were seated three people—a man of stately presence, grey-headed and erect, a lady of doubtful years and charms not wholly departed—and Barra,

The old man rose and came forward towards Kate with a strange expression of apology and appeal on his face.

"Kate, my lass!" said he.

"My father!" cried the girl, taking, however, no step towards him, but keeping her hold of Wat Gordon's hand.

But Wat was staring at the lady who sat beside Barra.

"My Lady Wellwood!" he said, in utter astonishment.

Barra smiled his thin, acrid, unmoved smile.

"You mistake, sir," he said; "not now my Lady Wellwood, but the fair bride of Roger McGhie and the very charming mistress of his mansion of Balmaghie."

CHAPTER XL

SERPENT'S EGGS

FOR a little we must leave both the narrow, sea-barriered, rock-girt bounds of Suliscanna and the flat, hard-won, and yet more hardly kept fields and polders of the Netherlands for the moorish pastures, the green, changeful woodlands, the flowery water-meadows of Balmaghie. It is necessary at this point to take a cast back in our story, and tell of the strange things which have befallen Roger McGhie since we saw him at our tale's beginning, making his farewells by the stirrup-leather of my Lady Wellwood.

It was perhaps natural that the laird of Balmaghie, delicate of body, retiring of habit, a recluse from the society of roaring bears like Lag and Baldoon, who were his immediate neighbours, should succumb readily enough to the fascinations of my Lady Wellwood. It is not so obvious, on the other hand, why she found pleasure in the company of Roger McGhie.

It may be that the caustic kindliness, the flavour of antique chivalry, which had compelled to more than liking the unwonted heart of John Graham of Claverhouse, also had power to fascinate the widow of the Duke of Wellwood. That title had been one of the late King's making, and in the absence of heirs direct, it had lapsed immediately on the death of the King's Minister and Administrator in Scotland, while the original impoverished earldom of Wellwood had

gone back to a kinsman remotely collateral. So my lady never forgot that she was not "the Dowager" merely, but still, in the face of all—Susannah, first and only Duchess of Wellwood.

Nevertheless, to her credit, perhaps, as a woman of discernment, she married Roger McGhie, and that though far younger, richer, and gallanter men stood ready at her call. But the needy King and his new Ministry had stripped her estates of most that her husband had so painfully gathered. Little was left her but the barren heritages of Grenoch—where, indeed, was heather enough and granite to spare, but where crops were few and scanty, and where even meadow-hay had a fashion of vanishing in the night, whenever the Dee water took it into its head to sweep through the narrow Lane, raising the loch till it overflowed the low-lying meads nearly to the house door of Grenoch itself.

Then, on the other hand, the acres of Balmaghie were undoubtedly broad, the finances of the laird unhurt by Government exactions, and the house of Balmaghie a wide and pleasant place compared with the little square block-house of the Grenoch, sitting squatly like a moor-hen's nest on its verge of reedy loch.

So the lady Susannah became, not long after Kate betook herself to Holland, the mistress of Balmaghie; but from some feeling of restraint or shame Roger McGhie had hitherto carefully kept the matter from his daughter, whose sentiments in the matter he had good reasons to suspect.

It had not seemed the least of the attractions of the house of Balmaghie to my lady, that at the time of her marriage it wanted the presence of the girl who till now had been its mistress. And she resolved that, once out, Kate should abide so—that is

till the time came when a match politically and socially suitable could be found for the girl, and also a home not too near the well-trimmed garden pleasaunces of Balmaghie.

So when Murdo McAlister, Lord of Barra, arrived at the dismantled fortalice of Thrieve as the guest of my Lord Maxwell, and word was brought that the exile desired an audience with "the lady of Balmaghie," the Duchess listened complacently enough to the words of the Lord of Barra and the Small Isles. The courtier dwelt much on the changes which were sure to come, the favour of the King's son-in-law, his own great position in Holland, and the yet greater to be attained when his Dutch master should take over the throne of Britain.

And we may be sure that my Lord of Barra spoke well. Calmly he told of the dangerous position of the young maid in Holland; lightly he referred to his own "rescue" of her in the Street of the Butchery —of which, indeed, Kate had herself given an account in one of her rare letters to her father from the city of Amersfort. He told how she was quartered unsuitably with private soldiers and their wives. But there he trod on dangerous ground, for in a moment the laird took up his parable against him.

"Lochinvar and young Earlstoun may indeed be private soldiers in Dutchdom," said Roger McGhie bluntly, "but do not forget that they are very good Galloway gentlemen here."

"Then," said Barra, "they had been greatly the better of remembering it in the Low Country. I speak with some heat, for I carry here in my side the unhealed wound dealt me in revenge by the knife of a girl of the streets whom Wat Gordon of Lochinvar took with him in his flight."

And still pale from his long illness, my Lord Barra in his dress of black velvet certainly appeared a most interesting figure to my lady of Balmaghie, who had a natural eye for such.

Then, taking courage from her evident sympathy, he went on to tell how with the help of Captain Smith of the *Sea Unicorn*, a respectable magistrate of the county of Dorset, he had again "rescued" Kate McGhie from her perilous position; how he had aided her to escape to the home of a lowland woman of good family, the wife of one of his own vassals, on the safe and suitable island of Suliscanna, to which place he asked the favour of the company of "Her Grace"—he desired pardon—of the Lady Balmaghie and her husband.

Whereupon, with voluble good-will from the lady and a certain dry and silent acquiescence from Roger McGhie, my Lord of Barra obtained his request. And so behold them sitting together when the *Sea Unicorn* overhauled the tide-driven boat of our young adventurers, and the treacherous sea-mists delivered Kate and her lover into the hands of the enemies of their loves.

"You are very welcome on board the ship *Sea Unicorn*," said Barra, bowing to the pair as they stood hand-in-hand on the deck.

Wat could not utter a word, so appalling a hopelessness pressed upon his spirit, such blank despair tore like an eagle at his heart.

But the lady of Balmaghie smiled upon him, even as of old her Grace the Duchess of Wellwood had done. Then she shook her head with coquettish reproach.

"Ah, Lochinvar," she cooed, "what is this we have heard of you? You come on board the *Sea Unicorn*

off the Isle of Suliscanna with one fair maid; you left the city of Amersfort with another. I fear me you have as little as ever of the grace of constancy. But after all, young men, alas! still will be young men. And indeed the age is noways a constant one!"

And my lady sighed as if the fatal gifts of constancy and continence had been the ever-present blights of her own life.

Then, suddenly as the lightning that shines from east to west, it flashed upon Wat how foolish he had been not to tell Kate all the story of the Little Marie. He realised now how easily, nay, how inevitably, all that had happened at the prison and among the sand-dunes might be used to his hurt. So, flushing to the temples, he stood silent.

Kate turned to her lover. A happy light of confidence shone in her eye.

"Tell my lady," she said, "that in her eagerness to think well of you according to her lights, she has given ear to false rumours. Tell her that it was to rescue me from the cruel treachery of my Lord Barra that you broke the prison bars and came over land and sea to take me out of his hands."

Barra smiled subtly, looking keenly at Wat from under the drooping eyelids of his triangular eyes, which glittered like the points of bayonets.

"It is indeed true," said Wat at last, forcing himself to speak, "that I—that I escaped out of prison and traced this maid over land and sea till I found her a captive on the Island of Suliscanna. It was my intention——"

"To return her to her father's care, no doubt," said Barra, dropping his words carefully like poison into a bowl.

"To beseech her to wed with me so soon as I should reach the mainland," said Wat bravely.

A change came over the countenance of my Lady Wellwood at the words. Though she had married Roger McGhie, it was not in her nature to let any former gallant cavalier escape her snares, nor yet to permit her plans of great political alliances in the future, based upon the girl's union with Barra, to be brought to naught.

But again the sneering voice of Barra cut the embarrassing silence.

"It was, then, I doubt not, in the company of this lady, whose hand you hold, that you drugged the gaoler of Amersfort, broke the prison and escaped. It was this lady who, being well acquainted with the purlieus of that temple of harlotry, the Hostel of the Coronation, stole three horses from Sheffell the landlord, and rode with you and your boon companion Scarlett—a man false to as many services as he has sworn allegiance to—out to the sand-dunes of Lis, where you and she abode till you found a passage to England. In all this you had, doubtless, the companionship and assistance of no other woman than this lady, whom with such noble and honourable condescension you now desire to marry. She it was (declare it briefly, true swain) who lied for you, stole for you, fought for you, abode with you, died for you —as the catch has it "all for love and nothing for reward.'"

At the close of Barra's speech Kate turned to Wat.

"Tell them," she said, "that there was no such woman with you."

CHAPTER XLI

LOVE THAT THINKETH NO EVIL

WAT stood silent, his face turning slowly from red to ashen white. What an arrant fool he had been, not to tell her all in those sweet hours on the island of Fiara—a score of Little Maries had mattered nothing to her then. Then everything would have been plain and easy. His conscience was indeed perfectly clear. But, partly because with the willing forgetfulness of an ardent lover he had forgotten, and partly because he had shrunk from marring with the name of another those precious hours of blissful communion of which he had hitherto enjoyed so few, he had neglected to tell Kate the tale. He saw his mistake now.

"Tell them, Wat," urged Kate confidently, "tell them all."

"Aye, tell them all," repeated Barra grimly, between his teeth, "tell them all your late love did for you, beginning with the favours of which your cousin Will and I were witnesses in the gilded room of the Hostel of the Coronation. Begin at the bottom—with the lady's shoe and the toast you drank out of that most worthy cup!"

Wat still stood silent before them. Kate dropped his hand perplexed, looking into his tragic face with bewildered, uncomprehending eyes.

"Why, Wat, what is the matter, dear love—tell them everything, whatever it is. Do not fear for me,"

whispered Kate, her true, earnest eyes, full of all faith and love, bent upon him without doubt or question.

"I cannot," he said hoarsely, at last; "I ought to have told you before—it is so difficult now. But I will tell you all—there is no shame in it, when all is told. No, do not take my hand till I have finished."

Then quite clearly and briefly Wat recounted all that had happened to the Little Marie—not sparing himself in the matter of the Inn of the Coronation, where he had been found by Will Gordon and Barra, but chiefly insisting upon the noble self-sacrifice of the girl and her death, welcome and sweet to her because of her love and repentance.

But the tale was told on board the *Sea Unicorn* under a double burden of difficulty. For the teller was conscious that he ought long ago to have confessed all this to his love; and then the story itself, simple and beautiful in its facts, was riddled and blasted by the bitter comments of Barra, and tinctured to base issues by his blighting sneers.

As Wat went on Kate drooped her head on her breast and clasped her hands before her. Even the love-light was for the moment dimmed in her proud eyes, but only with indignant tears, that her love should so be put to shame before those whom she would have given her life to see compelled to hold him in honour.

The heavy weight of unbelief against which he felt himself pleading in vain, gradually proved too much for Wat Gordon. He stopped abruptly and flung his hand impatiently out.

"I cannot go on," he said; "my words are not credited—of what use is it?"

"As you say, my Lord Lochinvar, of what use is it?" sneered Barra. "*That* you know best yourself.

You were asked a plain question—whether the maid who accompanied you on the first part of your wondrous Ulysses wanderings was the same with whom you arrived on board the *Sea Unicorn*. To that plain question you have only returned a very crooked answer. Have you nothing else that you can say to finish the lie in a more workmanlike fashion?"

"Jack Scarlett—Scarlett, come hither!" Wat cried suddenly.

And the master-at-arms, who very characteristically had gone forward to berth with the sailors, came aft as the men on deck passed the word for him.

"Will you tell this lady," said Wat, "what you know of my acquaintance with the Little Marie?"

Whereupon, soberly and plainly, like a soldier, John Scarlett told his tale. But for all the effect it had upon the listeners he might just as well have spoken it to the solan geese diving in the bay. Wat saw the unbelief settle deeper on the face of Roger McGhie, and the very demon of jealousy and malice wink from under the eyelids of my Lady Wellwood.

"I have a question to ask you, my noble captain of various services," said Barra, "a question concerning this girl and your gallant companion. What did you first think when this Marie joined you with the horses—in page's dress, as I have heard you say—and what when she told you that she had stabbed your friend's enemy and hers to the death?"

"I thought what any other man would think," answered Scarlett brusquely.

"And afterwards among the sand-dunes of Lis you discovered that all this devotion arose merely from noble, pure, unselfish, platonic love?"

The old soldier was more than a little perplexed by Barra's phrases, which he did not fully understand.

"Yes," he answered at last, with a hesitation which told more against his story than all he had said before.

Barra was quick to seize his advantage.

"You see how faithfully these comrades stick to one another—how touching is such fidelity. The intention is so excellent, even when truth looks out in spite of them through the little joins in the patch-work."

"God!" cried Scarlett fiercely. "I would I had you five minutes at a rapier's end for a posturing lying knave, a pitiful, putty-faced dog! I cannot answer your words, though I know them to be mere tongue-shuffling. But with my sword—yes, I could answer with that!"

Barra pointed to his side.

"Had your friend—your friend's friend, I should say—not had me at her dagger's end, I should have been most honoured. But the lady has spoilt my attack and parry for many a day. Nevertheless, I suffered in a good cause. For without that our general lover had hardly been allowed to enjoy the Arcadian felicities of the sand-dunes of Lis, nor yet his more recent, and I doubt not as agreeable, retirement to the caves and sea beaches of my poor Island of Fiara."

"You are the devil," cried Scarlett, writhing in fury. "But I shall live to see you damned one day!"

But Barra only smiled as he turned to confer apart a while with Roger McGhie and my lady.

Kate walked to the bulwarks and looked over. Wat stood his ground on the spot on which he had told his story; but Scarlett, as soon as he had finished, stalked away with as much dignity as upon short notice he could import into a pair of very untrustworthy sea-legs.

When the conference was over it was Roger

McGhie who spoke, very quietly and gently, as was ever his ancient wont.

"Kate, my lass," he said, "I have never compelled you to aught all my life—rather it hath been the other way, perhaps too much. And I will not urge you now. Do you still wish to forsake your father for this man, whose tale you have heard—a tale which, whatever of truth may be in it, he hath certainly hid from you as long as possible? Or will you return to your own home with me, your father, and with this noble lady, to whom I give you as a daughter?"

Kate stood clasping her hands nervously, and looking from one to the other of them.

But it was to Wat that she spoke.

"My true love, I do not distrust you, do not think that," she said, with her lips pale and trembling, her colour coming and going. "I believe every word in spite of them all. Aye, and shall always believe you. For indeed I cannot do otherwise and live. But oh, my lad" (here for the first time she broke into a storm of sobs), "if you had only trusted me—only told me—I should not have cared. She could not help loving you—but it was I whom you loved all the while."

Wat came nearer to her. She gave him her hand again.

"Nevertheless, for this time I must go with my father since he bids me. But be brave, Wat, dear lad," she went on, "I believe in you always. The good days will come, and good day or bad day, remember that I shall be ready for you whenever you call me to come to you!"

In a moment they were in each other's arms.

"I will come!" whispered Wat Gordon in her ear; "if I be alive, as God sees me, I will come to you when and where you need me."

Roger McGhie had turned his back on them. My lady's eyes glittered with malice and jealousy, but only my Lord Barra found a word to say.

"Most touching!" he sneered, "much more so indeed than facts—but perhaps hardly so convincing."

. . . . . .

Kate had gone below. The others still remained upon the deck. The *Sea Unicorn* was heading directly for the mainland.

Barra pointed to the blue hills which were slowly changing into grey olive on the lower slopes as the ship neared the land.

"We are honoured," he said, "with the company of so brave a lover and one so successful. But we would not keep him from other conquests. So since I, Murdo of Barra, do not use the daggers of harlots, nor yet the crumbling walls of towers, to crush those who hate me, I give you, sir, your liberty, which I hope you will use wisely in order that you may retrieve a portion of that honour which by birth is yours. I will set your companion and yourself on shore at the nearest point of land without any conditions whatsoever."

Wat bowed. He did not pay much attention. He was thinking rather of Kate's last words. Barra went over to the captain and entered into earnest talk with him.

It was the turn of the lady of Balmaghie. She came over to where Wat was standing by the side of the ship.

"You thought me beautiful once, or at least you told me so, Lochinvar," she said, laying her hand on his.

"I think you as beautiful to-day as ever I thought you," answered Wat, with a certain weary diplomacy. If the Mammon of Unrighteousness must have the

care of the Beloved, it might be as well to make a friend of Mammon.

"Yet you have sought other and younger loves"—she purred her words softly at him—"you have been unfaithful to the old days when it was not less than heaven for you to kiss my hand or to carry my fan."

"Unfaithful!" said Wat, laughing a little hard laugh; "yet your ladyship hath twice been wedded to men of your own choice, whilst I remain lonely, a wanderer, companionless."

"You will ever be welcome at the House of Balmaghie," she said, laying her hand on his.

Wat looked up eagerly. It was not an invitation he had looked for from the Duchess on this side the grave.

"Ever most welcome," repeated my lady, looking tenderly at him. "Indeed, gladly would I endeavour to comfort you if ever you come to us in sore trouble."

Wat turned away disappointed. He would certainly look for his consolation from another source, if ever he came within reach of the House of Balmaghie.

"I thank you, my lady," said Wat. "At present my heart is too heavy to permit me more fully to express my gratitude."

He spoke the words mechanically, without setting a meaning to them. He listened to his own lips speaking as if they had been another's, and wondered what they found to say.

It was the afternoon when at last the boat was lowered to put Wat and Scarlett ashore. They were already stepping across the deck to the ship's side, when Kate appeared at the top of the ladder which led up from the cabin. She walked straight to where Wat was standing and held out both her hands.

"I am yours; remember I shall ever be ready," she said quite clearly.

"And I," he said more softly, "will come to you were it across the world. Only in your hour of need send me once again the heart of gold for a sign."

And he took her token from his neck, touched it with his lips, and gave it back to her.

"Till you need me, keep it!" he said, and so stooped and kissed her on the forehead before them all.

Then, without looking back, he followed Scarlett down the ladder into the boat.

CHAPTER XLII

THE FIERY CROSS

WAT and Scarlett found themselves landed in a country which to all intents was one both savage and hostile. It was not indeed Barra's country, but the danger was scarcely less on that account. They were strangers and Sassenach. Wat carried gold in his belt, more than many a Highland chief had ever seen at one time in his life—gold which at Perth or Inverness could be exchanged for a prince's wealth of swords and daggers, pistols and fighting-gear.

It was in a little land-locked bay that they were disembarked. Great slatey purple mountains stretched away to the north; a range of lower hills, cut down to the roots by the narrow cleft of a pass, warded the bay to the east; while to the south the comrades looked out on a wilderness of isles and islets, reefs and spouting skerries, which foamed and whitened as the black iron teeth of the rock showed themselves, and the slow swell of the Atlantic came lumbering and arching in.

Wat and Scarlett sat down on the shore, which stretched away lonely and barren for miles on either side of them. They watched the boat return to the ship, as she lay with her sails backed, and shivering in the wind, waiting only for the crew to come on board before sailing for the south.

A slight figure could be seen immediately above

the bulwark on the land side. Wat rose to his feet and waved his hand. The white speck signalled a reply, and Kate McGhie, the maid of his love, carried the heart of gold away with her to the lands of the south, and the spaces of the sea widened every moment between the truest lovers the world held.

Scarlett and Wat sat a long time watching the ship dwindling into a mere tower of whiteness in the distance, the seas closing bluer and bluer about her, and the whole universe growing lonely behind her, wanting the Beloved.

At last Scarlett spoke.

"Lad, have ye had enough of adventures," he said, more sadly than was his wont, "or are ye as keen after them as ever? It seems that we have now put ourselves in every man's ill graces, so far as I can see. Whether James or William bear the gree, to us signifies not a jot; for if James, then the first King's man that comes across us, holds you for the old outlawry in the matter of wounding my Lord Wellwood, and me for taking your side when I brought you the King's letter to Brederode; and if William wear the crown, lo, for prison-breaking and manslaughter—aye, and for desertion of his army, both you and poor silly John Scarlett are alien and outlaw in all the realms of the Dutchman. I tell you we are doomed at either end of the stick, Wat, my man."

"And faith, I care not much," quoth Wat, watching with wistful eyes the *Sea Unicorn* vanishing with the one thing that was dear to him on earth.

"Care or no care," said Scarlett, "it is time for us to be on our feet!"

So Wat, rising obediently, kissed his hand behind his companion's back to the white tower which was now sinking in the utmost south.

As soon almost as the two adventurers had left the sand and shingle of the shore, they found themselves upon the short heather of certain rough, moorish foothills. No house pleasantly reeking was to be discerned—not so much as a deer nor even a wandering sheep in that wide wild place.

So Wat and Scarlett fared forth straight to the east, keeping mostly parallel with the shores of a fine loch, which stretched inward in the direction of the notch in the hills which they had seen from their landing-place.

It was towards evening when the two friends came to the summit of a little knoll and stood looking down upon a curious scene. Beneath them, scattered among the *débris* of some prehistoric landslip, lay a small Highland village—if village it could be called, of which each house or hut was built against the side of a great boulder or rock fallen from the hillside. The cottages were no better than rude shelters of turf and stone, roofed with blackened heather and scattered at every conceivable angle, as if they had been dredged forcibly out of the bottom of a reluctant pepper-pot and had taken root where they fell.

In the centre, however, was a kind of open space —not levelled nor cleared of turf and stones, but with all its primeval rocks sticking through the scanty turf, blackened and smoothed by the rubbing they had received from the fundamental parts of innumerable generations of goats and children.

In this space a dozen men in rude kilts and plaids of ancient faded tartan were collected, arguing and threatening with as much apparent fierceness as though some one of them was to be killed during the next five minutes. A small army of women hovered on the outskirts and made independent forays into the

affray, catching hold of this and that other valiant discourser, and if she got the right hold and purchase, swinging him forthwith out of the turmoil—only, however, to return to it again as soon as her grasp relaxed.

There was, therefore, a centre of disturbance of which the elements were entirely male—while contemporary, and on the whole concentric with it, revolved a number of smaller cyclones, of which the elements were about equally male and female. Fists were shaken here and there in all of them, and voices rose loud and shrill. But from the heart of the darker and more permanent quarrel in the centre there came at intervals the threatening gleam of steel, as this one and that other stooped and flashed the *skein dhu*, plucked out of his garter, defiantly in the face of his opponent.

In the very midst Wat could see a thick-set man who carried over his shoulder a couple of ash-plants rudely tied together. This contrivance was of small dimensions, and the sharpened ends were burnt black and further stained with blood and what looked like red wax.

The man who carried it had no other weapon—if this could be called a weapon, which appeared as harmless as a boy's sword of lath. Yet as the little man thrust it towards this one and that, the strong men of the circle shrank back instantly with the greatest alarm, shaking their heads and girning their teeth, as Scarlett said, "like so many wull-cats on a dyke."

There seemed to be no end to this bloodless but threatening quarrel, which blackened and scattered for all the world like a swarm of bees whirling abroad on a July day, when the goodwives run beneath with iron pots and clattering skellets to settle the swarm ere

it has time to leave the farm-town. But suddenly out of one of the largest and most distinguished of the houses—one not much, if anything, inferior to a Galloway "swine ree"—there issued a tall dark man who walked with an air, swinging his tartans and rattling the gold tassel on the basket hilt of his claymore.

He made straight for the thickest of the quarrel, and so soon as he arrived there he knocked this disputant one way and hurled another that, like a schoolmaster unexpectedly descending upon unruly boys. And it was ludicrous to see these stalwart Highlandmen sprawling on the ground, holding their ears, which had been smitten so suddenly and with such a mighty buffeting. For the fierceness on their faces when first they felt the blow faded into instant desire to get out of the way—even culminating in a kind of satisfied good-humour so soon as they set eyes on their chastiser, as though it were not less than an honour to be smitten by such a hand.

In ten seconds the quarrel was no more, and the very men who had warred and debated were to be seen most valiantly retiring behind their wives' petticoats out of reach of the chilling eye-glances and hard-buckled fists of the tall, dark peace-maker.

He, on his part, strode directly to where stood the little man with the blackened cross of ash-plants, and taking this article unceremoniously out of his hand, he thrust it into those of the nearest bystander, and pointed with his hand in the direction of the knoll on which Wat and Scarlett had their station.

As he did so it was evident that he observed their presence for the first time, and his hand dropped quickly to his side.

CHAPTER XLIII

COLL O' THE COWS

THEN, almost before Wat and Scarlett had time to draw their swords and stand on the defensive, they in their turn became the centre of all the noise in the village. Steel flashed in plenty all about, and half a score of wild men crouched and "hunkered" round them waiting for the chance to spring. But with Walter Gordon and Jack Scarlett standing back to back, each with a long sword in one hand and a pistol in the other, it was not easy for the most alert to find an unprotected opening.

Meanwhile the tall dark man, who had the manifest air of a chief, walked leisurely towards them and stood looking on at the affray.

"Sir," cried Wat, "call off your men, and permit us to explain our presence."

But the man vouchsafed not a word in reply, only stood and looked over the heads of his men at Scarlett's legs.

"Why, man," he cried at length, "ye should be for the Good Cause; ye have gotten the King of France's boots on!"

"Aye," said Scarlett, instantly dropping his point; "certainly we are for the Good Cause. Truly, also, I have the King of France's boots on, and that with good reason, for when I left France I was officer in His Majesty's Luxemburg regiment."

Which, indeed was very true, but certain other things had happened in between.

The tall man seemed pleased at his own acute observation. He called off his men with a single stern word, which sounded almost like a bidding given to a dog to lie down.

"But what seek you in my country?" he asked them.

Now Scarlett would have given something to know in what country he was, and still more to know who was the owner of it; but not knowing either, he had to do the best he could with the limited information at his disposal.

"We are here," he said, laying his finger meaningly on his lip, "on the part of His Majesty the King of France, for the furtherance of the Good Cause."

And he added under his breath, "And a precious deal would I give to know for certain what in this instance the Good Cause is!"

For indeed it seemed not likely that Louis was fomenting any rebellion against the arms of King James, who, when Wat and Scarlett left the harbour of Lis-op-Zee, ruled unquestioned at Whitehall.

But Scarlett's diplomatic answer was accepted without reserve.

"Friends of the true King and officers of His Christian Majesty of France are ever friends of Keppoch's," he cried, striding forward frankly and giving a hand to each.

Scarlett felt a strong desire to whistle as the chief revealed himself.

"'Coll o' the Cows!'" he muttered softly; "we are indeed in the gled's claws this day."

For Coll o' the Cows was the wildest chief as well as the most noted cattle-lifter beyond the Highland line, and though now apparently standing for "the

Good Cause" (whatever that might be), he had all his life hitherto stood entirely for the very excellent cause of his own vested right to drive other folks' cattle and eat other folks' beef.

"Doubtless you will have seen my Lord Dundee?" said Keppoch to Scarlett, whom very evidently he considered the leading spirit of the two.

Wat pricked up his ears.

"Is Colonel Graham here?" he said, looking inquiringly at the chief.

Keppoch frowned, and for the first time looked a little suspicious.

"Ye must have come over the line but lately," he said, "if ye know not that my Lord Dundee hath broken with Duke Hamilton's Cat Convention, and is now raking the Highlands for levies as a servant lass rakes the night coals to light her morning fires."

"Indeed ye may say so, for we have within the hour been landed from the ship which gave us passage from France—landed upon the shore at the mouth of your fine loch there," replied Scarlett, pointing westward with his hand.

The brow of Coll o' the Cows instantly cleared.

"It is true; I see by your boots ye have been in the salt water coming ashore." For his pursuit of cattle seemed manifestly to have sharpened his faculty of observation.

"We have to be careful these ill days," he said, "when one cannot tell whether a man is for the Good Cause or for the Dutch thief that cocks his dirty orange plumes so bravely on the road 'twixt Torbay and London."

Observing their evident interest, he went on with his information. It is good in a wild country to be the first bearer of great tidings.

"We have e'en just sent the fiery cross on to the country o' the Camerons. Some o' my lads were no that carin' aboot carrying it, for there has been a bit nimble-going feud betwixt us, and it is the Camerons' turn to make the score even."

"And how was the matter settled?" asked Wat, with curious interest.

"Och!" said Keppoch, "I just gied the fiery cross to Duncan o' Taliskier. He is no to say a very right son of Ian at any rate. Ye see, his mother was a woman from the north—from the country of the Grants. And as for the father o' him, faith, there was nane kenned to rights wha he was—even hersel'. But for a' that, Duncan o' Taliskier is wonderful handy to keep about a house for jobs o' this kind."

"It is indeed excellently invented," said Scarlett approvingly, "for I learned long ago that 'always sacrifice your worst troops—your allies if you can' —is an ancient and well-considered military maxim."

The chief went on: "You will be wondering what Keppoch does here on the edge of this country o' Camerons? Faith, ye may well wonder! But there's a bit plantation of McDonald's over the hill there, and though they have taken Lochiell's name they find it for the good of their healths to pay a bit cess to Keppoch—just as the peetifu' burgher bodies of Inverness do; for mony a loon is feared o' Colin —Guid kens what for."

Wat and Scarlett nodded. They were too completely ignorant of the niceties of the state of society into the midst of which they were cast to venture on any reply.

"But ye shall not bide here," said Keppoch; "ye are instantly to come your ways with me to Keppoch, my head place, where my castle is. This bit townie

here is well enough, but it is not fit for the like of gentlemen that have been in France even to set their feet within."

So in a little while Wat and Scarlett found themselves following Coll o' the Cows and his ragged regiment towards "Keppoch, my head place, where my castle is."

First there went a dozen or so of small, black-felled, large-horned cattle, mostly young, which constantly put their heads over their shoulders and looked back toward the pastures they had left, routing and roaring most excruciatingly. Then came a round dozen of Keppoch's men urging them on, sometimes with the flat of the scabbard and sometimes pricking them with the naked points of their claymores.

On the hills above skirmished an irregular force of small light men and half-naked lads. Keppoch pointed them out to his companions.

"Yonder goes my flying column," he said cunningly, "for so it is designated in the books of war. Keppoch is not an ignorant man—far from it, as ye shall know ere ye win clear of him. He did not go to the schools of Edinburgh for the best part of three winters for nothing. That was where he learned the English so well—frae the 'prentice lads o' the Lawnmarket—fair good drinkers they are, too, and as ready wi' their nieves as the prettiest gentleman with his blade."

He considered a little, as if measuring his own qualifications.

"Maybe ye wudna juist say that I am what ye might call a learned man, nor do I set myself up for an authority on law and doctrine, like Black Ewan owerby at Lochiell. But at least, for every good milch cow in his byres there are ten in mine, and never a Sassenach bonnet-laird comes to Keppoch to claim

them. So ye see, so muckle education has not been thrown away on me."

At this moment three hungry-looking loons came down the side of a glen, wading waist-deep among the heather, and driving a small, shaggy Highland cow before them, little bigger than a lowland sheep.

"Ah, good lads," he cried, "plaided men, carriers of the buckler, where gat ye that ane?"

The nearest man cried something that sounded like "Deil-a-mony-mae!" whereat Keppoch laughed and nodded his head.

The small cow joined the herd, and was soon racing up the long glen towards the north. But the incident was not ended, for before they had gone far over the heather a woman came tearing down the hillside, and flinging herself down at Keppoch's feet, she clasped him by the legs and kissed the hem of his tartan in an agony of supplication.

"Some blood-feud," thought Wat, as he listened to the frenzied outpouring of appeal. Keppoch stood awkwardly enough, listening at first frowningly, and then with some signs of yielding in his brow, the sight of which made the woman yet more earnest.

After a moment's thought he looked up and cried some direction to the clansmen who followed the cattle ahead of them. The little red cow was turned and came uncertainly along the glen, sometimes roaring back to the herd and at other times casting up her head to look for her own well-noted landmarks. As soon, however, as she saw the woman the cow ran to her like a dog and nuzzled a wet, foam-flecked mouth into her mistress's bosom.

The woman again clasped Keppoch's hand, kissing it over and over and calling down blessings upon him. Then right briskly she took the heather, skipping

along the side of the hill with a light well-accustomed foot, the little red cow following her as closely as a dog, leaping runnels of water and skirting perilous screes on the way to her native pastures.

"What might all this be?" asked Scarlett.

Keppoch looked rather shamefaced, like a man expecting to do a good deed by stealth, who suddenly finds it fame.

"Och," said he, "it was just a widow woman that had a bit coo, and some o' my lads met the coo. And the coo it cam' after them, and the widow woman she cam' after the coo; and then, puir body, she asked me if I was a Christian man, and I said, 'No; I was a McDonald.' And she said that so was she. So because she was a McDonald, I gied the puir woman back her coo. It wasna a guid coo, ony way. But she was very gratefu'. She said she was gaun to be mairried again, and that the man—an Appin Stewart, greedy hound!—wadna hae her without the coo."

CHAPTER XLIV

GREAT DUNDEE

At Keppoch the months passed slowly enough for our two exiles. They heard no news from the south —of Barra nothing, no word of Kate McGhie. The country about them was in a constant ferment—gatherings here and there on behalf of King James; false reports about the doings of the Hamiltonians and Conventiclers in Edinburgh; reports that the Westland Whigs were marching to exterminate the lads of the glens, in revenge for the doings of the Highland Host. They had sworn (so the tale ran) to take back to Ayrshire and Galloway the booty of the "Seventy-nine," which still constituted the best part of the plenishings of most Highland cottages to the north of the lands of Breadalbane and McCallum More.

It was hard to wait in blank ignorance; but Wat knew that his best hope of coming to his own again, and so to the winning of his love, was to abide the chances of war, and by good service to the King to deserve the restoration of his fiefs and heritages.

Luckily for the two outlaws, no French officers came to Keppoch, nor any, indeed, who knew either Scarlett or Wat, otherwise their lives had not been worth an hour's purchase. But as week after week went by, they became great favourites with McDonald, and were taken on several occasions to see Sir Ewan Cameron of Lochiell—a wise, silent,

benignant man, who at first said little, but contented himself with watching them silently and subtly from under his eyebrows.

"I remember your father," he said, suddenly flashing a look on Wat.

"You remember my father?" repeated Wat eagerly; "I did not know he had ever been in the Highlands."

"Nor was he," said Lochiell; "it was in Edinburgh, when his head was cocked up on the Nether Bow, that I mind him—and a fine, wise-like, honest-seeming head it was."

The young man straightened himself fiercely, suspecting an intention to insult him.

"Na, na," said Lochiell smilingly; "that's where every honest man's head ought to land at the last. James Graham's was there afore your father's, and mine, I doubt not, will follow one day. But they will send Keppoch's black puddock-stool tied up in a poke to fricht the bairns of Inverness."

"Ye are acquaint with my Lord Dundee, they tell me?" was Lochiell's next question.

"Aye," said Wat, "and well acquaint—though I know not how he would receive me now. Yet many a time have I ridden blithely enough at his side when I was a lad, until I had the misfortune to be outlawed and attainted by the Privy Council——"

"What was that for—not ony maitter o' religion and godliness, I hope? Nae sic Whiggery about a brisk lad like you, surely?" said Keppoch.

"It was for the small matter of sticking a sword into a man or two belonging to my Lord Duke of Wellwood," interrupted Scarlett, "and maybe for helping his Grace himself to an ounce of lead——"

"Hoot!" cried Keppoch, "John Graham will never steer ye for ony sic cause. He is great on the drill

and discipline, but as to the richtin' o' a bit private misunderstanding, that surely is every gentleman's ain business."

"That was not the view the Council took of the matter," said Wat, smiling.

"Oh, they wad doubtless be o' the ither man's clan, or his connections and well-wishers in some shape—ye couldna blame them. They wad do the best they could for their side, nae doot," answered Keppoch.

And Lochiell listened to all with a gravely smiling face like a man well pleased.

At Keppoch there was one day a muster and a show of weapons, after which came sword-play and fighting with the Lochaber axe, assault with targe and without targe—all of which Wat and Scarlett watched with infinite zest and unwearied amusement.

When it was well over, and all the champions from the glens had performed before the chief and Lochiell (who were then in great amity), Keppoch invited Wat to try a bout with him. Wat professed his inexperience with the heavier blade of the claymore, but asked to be permitted to retain his own lighter and finer "Andrea"—which indeed had scarcely ever left his side since he recovered it in the locker of the boat from which he had been cast ashore on the Isle of Fiara.

So before long, weapon in hand, the huge black chieftain faced Lochinvar, towering over him like a son of Anak, his very sword casting a shadow like a weaver's beam.

They saluted in form and fell-to.

Clash! The blades met, and almost immediately Keppoch swept his sword in a full cut at Wat's shoulder. The young man measured his distance, stepped aside, and the next moment his Andrea

pricked Keppoch's side below the arm. It was a mere touch with the point, but had the blade stood a handbreadth in the giant's body, as it might have done, the sons of Ian would have needed another chief.

Coll o' the Cows was more than a little astonished; but thinking the matter some accidental chance which could not be repeated, he professed his readiness to proceed.

"Man," cried Lochiell, who had been attentively watching the combat, "not Coll o' the Cows, but Coll o' the Corbies ye would have been if that laddie had liked. For oh, man, ye would hae been deid as Dugald More, and the clan looking for a tree to hang the young man on by this time."

With this most disabling thought in his mind to warn him from a too complete victory, Wat once more guarded, and for a long time contented himself with keeping off the furious strokes of the chief's assault, as easily, to all appearance, as a roof turns aside the pelting of a summer shower. Then, as Keppoch took breath a moment, his first fury having worn itself out, Wat attacked in his turn, and, puzzling his opponent as was his wont with the lightning swiftness of his thrust and recovery, caught his claymore deftly near the hilt, and in a moment it was flying out of his fingers.

Keppoch gazed after his weapon with as much surprise as if a hand had been reached out of the blue sky to snatch it from his grasp.

"God!" he cried, "but ye are a most mighty sworder—ne'er a one like ye within the Highland line. Who was your master at the play?"

Wat pointed to where old Jack Scarlett sat smiling complacently beside Lochiell.

"There is my teacher," he said, "and at my best I

am but a bairn with a windlestraw in my master's hands."

Scarlett wagged his beard at Keppoch's evident consternation.

"No, no," he said, "I am old and stiff. Do not believe him. Why, lad, ye beat me the last time I tried ye with that same trick, though indeed I myself had taught it ye at the first."

"But I was vexed for the lad," he added under his breath, "and maybe I did not just try my best."

Of course after this nothing would serve the chiefs but that Wat and Scarlett must fight a long bout with the blunted point, which presently they did amid tremendous excitement.

"Oich! Oich!" shouted the clansmen, jumping in the air and yelling at every good stroke and lightning parry.

"Bone o' Dugald More—what heevenly fechtin'!" cried Keppoch. "I declare I am like to greet—me that hasna grat since the year sixty, when Ian Mackintosh of Auchnacarra died afore I could kill him. Oh for the like o' you twa to lead a foray intil the country of the Lochiell Camerons—*I mean the Appin Stewarts, foul fa' them!* We wad gang in the daytime. For oh! it wad be a peety that sic bonny sword-play should be wasted in killing folk in the nicht season."

And the tears actually streamed from the eye of Black Colin as he watched the swords clash and click, meeting each other sweetly and willingly like trysted lovers.

"This is worth a' the kye frae Achnasheen to Glen Urquhart," he cried; "ah, that was a stroke! 'Tis better than ganging to a kirk!"

More than once Wat nearly got home. But old

Jack, standing a little stiffly on his legs and biting at a bit of sour grass, always turned the point an inch aside at the critical moment. At last came the opening, and the master's return flew like lightning. Wat's blade was forced upwards in spite of his lowered wrist, and lo! Scarlett's point stood against the third button of his coat as steadily as a master in a school points at the blackboard with his ferule.

A great shout went up from the throng. The hands of both combatants were shaken. Keppoch's defeat was avenged. Such swordsmanship had never before been seen by any son of Ian. The reputation of both master and pupil was made on the spot. Lochiell and Keppoch vied with each other in civilities, and the event became a daily one—but after this with a pair of foils, which the master-at-arms deftly manufactured.

In many such ways the months passed, and the spring came again with delicate green kindling along the watercourses, as the birch began to cast her tresses to the winds, and the grass tufts fought hard with the conquering heather.

But upon a day late in the month of May the party at Keppoch was broken by a sudden definite call. Three horsemen rode up to the door one blazing noontide. Scarlett and Keppoch were playing cards, the chief eagerly and noisily, Scarlett with the dogged use-and-wont of a hundred camps. Wat Gordon was cleaning his arms and accoutrements in the hall; for though they two had landed with little save the swords by their sides—now, thanks to their quality as swordsmen, and also somewhat to the weight of the gold in Wat's belt (which had so nearly been the death of him in the Suck of Suliscanna), they had been equipped with all the necessities of war.

The first of the three riders who entered into the hall of Keppoch was no other than my Lord Dundee. He looked thirty years older than when Wat had seen him last riding by in the gloaming to the house of Balmaghie—greyer, more wearied, sadder too, with his face drawn and pale in spite of the sun and the wind.

He greeted Keppoch courteously but without great cordiality, glanced his eye once over Jack Scarlett, and seemed to take his quality in a moment—gravely saluting the good soldier of any rank and all ranks. Then he looked about him slowly.

"Why, Lochinvar!" he cried, astonished, "what wind hath blown you here—not recruiting for the Prince of Orange, I hope, nor yet trying to cut my favour with Keppoch?"

"Nay," said Wat, "but if an outlaw and an exile may, ready as ever to fight to the death for King James."

"Why, well said," answered my Lord Dundee, smiling, "yet if I remember rightly I think you owed His Majesty not so much favour."

"In the matter of the Privy Council and my Lord Wellwood?" said Wat, shrugging his shoulders; "as to that, I took my risks like another. And if I had to pay the piper—why, it was at least no one but myself who called the tune."

"Not my lady—my late Lady Wellwood, I mean?" said Dundee, glancing at him with the pale ghost of mirthfulness on his face.

Wat shook his head.

"Of my own choice I took the barred road, and wherefore should I complain that I had to settle the lawing when I came to the toll-gates? But at least I am glad that you bear me no grudge, my lord," said

Wat, "for doubtless after all it was a matter of the king's justice."

"Grudge!" cried one of those who were with the Viscount, "it had been a God's blessing if you had stood your weapon a handbreadth out on the other side of his Grace of Wellwood when you were about it."

Whereupon with no further word Dundee and Keppoch retired to confer apart; and that night, when the Viscount rode away from the house, his three followers had become four. For Wat Gordon rode by his side as in old days on the braes of Garryhorn before any of these things befell. But Jack Scarlett abode still with Keppoch and Lochiell to help them to bring their clansmen into the field.

CHAPTER XLV

KILLIEKRANKIE

THE July morning wakened broad and fair. The swifts circled in widening sweeps about the Castle of Blair. Wat Gordon slept in the hall, wrapped in his plaid—a gift from Keppoch. The McDonald lay that night with his own men out on the lea, but many of the younger chiefs of Dundee's levy, McLean of Duart and Donald of Sleat, were also encamped round the hall.

It was after four of the clock when a hand touched Wat's shoulder. He looked up alert on the instant with the trained wakefulness of the soldier. His eyes met those of the Lord Dundee, who without a word strode slowly up the stairs.

Wat rose and followed his general, making his toilet with a single shake of the plaid over his shoulder. Presently they stood together on the battlements, where Dundee leaned his elbow on the highest part of the wall and looked to the east. The sun was just rising between Ben-y-Gloe and Ben-y-Vrackie.

Dundee stood a long time looking round him before he spoke. Wat kept in the background, standing modestly by the edge of the tiles, where they went crow-stepping up to the rigging. He dared not intrude upon the thoughts or plans of his commander.

At last Dundee pointed with his hand, sweeping it

over the sward beneath, which was black with Highlanders, all squadded according to their clans. Most of them still lay in their plaids, scattered broadcast as if they had been slain on the field of battle, with their claymores held in their arms as a mother holds a favourite child. But here and there a few early foragers were already busy gathering birch and dwarf oak to build the morning camp-fires, while down by the river where the lowland cavalry were picketed many blue columns of smoke arose.

"A bonny sight!" said the general slowly. "Aye, a bonny sight! Three thousand men that are men and not a feared heart nor an unwilling blade among them. And yet," he added, a little sadly, "if I were away all that would break and vanish like yon white cloud crawling on the shoulder of Ben Vrackie."

He pointed to where the morning mist was trailing itself in quickly dissolving wreaths and vanishing wisps over the mountain.

"Aye, like the mist they came and like the mist they will go—if I be not here the morrow's morn to lead them. Lochiell is wise indeed. He would command us all with skill and fortitude. But then how Glen Garry and Keppoch would cock their bonnets at that! Sandy McLean there might hold the clansmen and take them to Edinburgh, yet Sandy is not chief even of his own clan, but an apple-cheeked lad who thinks only of taking the eyes of maidens. Grown babes all of them—yet men whom I have welded into a weapon of strength to fight the King's warfare."

"Think you the enemy will attack us this day?" said Wat, with the deference of a young soldier to an elder, whose favour, though great, may not be presumed upon.

"They will come indeed," said the general, "but it is we that shall attack. I would it had been a day or two later. For the Western men are not come in, and Lochiell hath not yet half his tail behind him. Nevertheless, 'twill serve. Mackay I mind of old—in the Dutch provinces—a good drill-sergeant that fights by the book; but a brave man—yes, a very brave man."

For as an unquestioned beauty is the first to acknowledge beauty in others, so John Graham could readily allow courage to his opponents.

Yet this morning a constant melancholy seemed to overspread the beautiful countenance that had been the desire of women, the fear or adoration of men. In his converse with Lochinvar not a trace remained of that haughtiness which had so often distinguished his dealings with other men, nor yet of that relentlessness which he himself had so often mistaken for the firmness of military necessity.

Wat's bosom swelled within him as he looked on that host of plaided men. He seemed to see Scotland swept to the Solway, and the King coming home in triumph to his own again. The old tower of Lochinvar rose up before him. He thought proudly of building up again the broken-down walls, and for his love's sake setting the lordship of Lochinvar once more among its peers. It would be passing sweet to walk with her by the hillside and look down upon their home, with the banner once again floating at the staff, and the hum of serving-men about it.

"It is indeed a most noble sight!" he cried in rapture.

Dundee glanced at him, and marked the heightened colour of the lad with kindly, tolerant favour. He thought he spoke of the mustered clans.

"Aye, glorious—truly," said he. "But build not on sand. Ere ten days be past, if these lads of the mist find not plunder, Clan Ronald will be off to spoil Clan Cameron, and Keppoch, the Wild Cat, will be at the throat of Clan Mackintosh. I have welded me a weapon which, tempered to the turning of a steel blade this morning, may be but a handful of sand when the wind blows off the sea by to-morrow at this time."

He stood silent a while, and his face grew fixed and stern as when he gave orders in battle.

"To-day I draw sword for a King that dared not draw sword for himself—for a house that has ever used its mistresses well and its soldiers ill. Let us make no mistake. You and I, Wat, go out this day on a great venture, and on our heads it is. We have a true soldier to fight. For you and I have seen William of Orange, and in this the day of our distress we shall have no help from our friends, save these three hundred Irish kerns with their bent pikes and their bows and arrows, no better than bairns that shoot crows among the corn."

He shrugged his shoulders and lifted his graceful body erect.

"So be it! After all, it is not my business. Enough for me that I do the King's will and walk straightly among so many that go crookedly. To-night I will end it if I can, and drive the Dutchman to his own place. But if not—why, then, it shall end me. I know, I know," he went on quickly, as if Walter had reminded him of something, "I have a wife and a bairn down there. I am a man as other men. I would fain see Jean Cochrane, clad in white, passing here and there among the walks of the garden, gathering flowers, and the youngling toddling about

her feet—were it but for once, before this night I bid the war-pipes blow at the setting of the sun."

He turned towards the lands of the south where he had earned much hatred and deadly fear.

"It may be as they say, that I have ridden over-harshly on the King's service, and trodden on some whom I might have lifted with my hand. But, God wot, it was ever the King's service and not mine own! I ever judged it better that there should be a little timeous bloodletting, than that a whole people should perish. But now I see that the King and I were not wise. For a war that stirs up folk's religion never comes to an end. And for all the good I did, I might just as well never have set foot in Galloway or the south. But enough, 'tis over now, and there remains—three thousand claymores and an empty title! Well, we shall find out to-day whether kings are indeed anointed, as they say. Ah Wat, the sun is high, the light broad and fair on Athol braes. But ere it fades, you and I may find out many things that priest and presbyter could not unriddle to us."

He made as if to descend from the Castle wall, but took a second thought.

"Bid the bugle sound!" he ordered, quickly changing his tone. "Invite the chiefs to a council. Send Dunfermline to me—and go yourself and get some breakfast."

. . . . . .

It was almost at the way-going of the day. The sons of the mist crouched low among the heather and watched the Saxon soldiers struggling up through the dark and narrow glen. King William's men were weary and sore driven, for they had been there under the sun's fierce assault since noon that day.

So near were the clansmen to their foes that they

could distinguish the uniform and accoutrement of each regiment, as it straggled slowly out under the eyes of the General, and formed on the little green shelf overhanging the deep cleft of the Garry.

Wat stood with Dundee upon the crest of the hill above. The General had fallen silent, but a look of eager expectancy lit his face.

"I have them," he said, low to himself, "it is coming right. We shall balance accounts with the Dutchman ere it be dark."

To him came Keppoch, pale to the lips with rage.

"This is no war, my Lord-General," he said, "they are through the pass and you hold us here in check! Why, with the rocks of the hillside my single clan could have annihilated them—swept them in heaps into the black pools of the Garry."

My Lord Dundee smiled a tolerant smile as a mother might at the ignorance of a wayward, fretful child.

"Bide ye, Keppoch," he said kindly, "ye shall have your fill of that work—but we must not make two mouthfuls of this Orange. Our advantage is great enough. We shall meet them on plain field, and ere we be done with them, ye shall walk across the Garry upon their dead bodies, bootless and in dry socks, if it please you."

Presently the Lowland army had dribbled itself completely out of the pass and stood ranked, regiment by regiment, awaiting the onset. Mackay had done all that skill and silence could do in such a desperate case, for the men of the mountains had all the choice of the ground and of the time for attack.

Clan by clan Dundee set his men on the hill crests solidly phalanxed, but with wide gaps between the divisions—a noble array of great names and mighty

chiefs—McLean, Clan Ranald, Clan Cameron, Glengarry, Stewarts of Athol and Appin, men of the King's name from east and west. Well might Dundee have forgotten his melancholy mood of the morning.

The sun touched the western hills, halved itself, and sank like a swiftly dying flame. The blue shadows strode eastward with a rush. The grey mist began to fill the deep glen of the Garry.

"Ready!" cried the General.

The war-pipes blared. The plaided men gave a shout that drowned the pibrochs, and the clans were ready for the charge.

From beneath arose a response, a faint, wavering cry, without faith or cohesion.

"Ah," cried Lochiell, "have at them now! That is not the cry of men who are going to conquer!"

Dundee raised his hand and the chiefs watched for it to fall. It fell.

"Claymore!" shouted Lochiell, who had been standing like a pillar at the head of his clan.

Keppoch, wild with the joy of battle, instantly fired his gun from where he stood, and throwing his brand into the air, he caught it by the hilt as he too gave the order to charge.

Slowly at first, but quickening their pace as they neared the foe, the clans came down. They held their fire till they were within a hundred yards of the enemy, grimly enduring without reply three separate volleys from the disciplined ranks of the Lowland army. They paused a moment and fired a wild, irregular volley. Then with the unanimous flash of drawn swords in the air, the whole wild array charged down with a yell upon the triple line of the enemy.

Wat rode by the side of the General; for Dundee charged with the van, exposing himself in the very

front of danger. Half way down the slope the old colonel of horse noticed that the Lowland cavalry were not following. He turned in his saddle, lifted his sword, and waved the squadrons on.

"For the King! Charge!" he cried, pointing with the blade to the serried line of Mackay's regiments below.

But at that moment there came another withering volley from the English line, threshing the hillside like hail. A bullet struck Dundee under the uplifted arm. Instinctively he shifted his bridle hand, and set himself grimly to the charge again; but the quickly growing pallor of his face and the slackness of his grasp told the tale of a terrible wound.

Lochinvar had scarce time to dismount and receive his General in his arms, before Dundee fainted and his head fell on Wat's shoulder. His charger galloped on, leading the regiment into action, as though he felt that his master's part had devolved on him.

In an instant the assault swept past them, and Wat and the wounded soldier were left, as it had been alone on the field. Here and there a clansman, stricken by a bullet, strove to rise and follow the onset of his clan. He would stumble a few yards, and then throw up his hands and fall headlong. But up from the river edge there came a hell of fiercely mingled sounds. At the first glance at the wound, Wat saw there was no hope. Looking over the pale set features of the General, as he lay reclined in his arms, he could see the thin English lines fairly swept away. One or two regiments seemed to have been missed, standing idly at their arms, like forgotten wheat in a corner of an ill-reaped field; but for the rest, clansmen and red soldiers alike had passed out of sight.

Presently the dying commander opened his eyes.

"My Lord," said Wat softly, "how is it with you?"

"Nay, rather, how goes the day?" said Dundee with an eager look.

"Well for the King," answered Wat.

"Then," replied John Graham, "if it be well with him, it is the less the matter for me."

With that he laid his head back on Wat's breast contentedly. He seemed to wander somewhat in his thoughts, speaking fast and disorderly.

"Maybe I was in the wrong—in the wrong. Yet I did it for the King's good. But I was sore vexed for the wife and bairns. And yet the carrier suffered it very unconcernedly, and said he was glad to die—which I can well believe. Maybe he, too, had done well for his King."

His mind dwelt much upon far-off unhappy things. Anon he seemed to see some terrible tragedy, for he put his hand before his face as if to shut out a painful sight.

"Enough of that, Westerha'," he said in a grieved tone, "this serves no good end."

Then at the last there came a smile breaking over his face, and he lifted his hand lightly and gently like one who dandles something tender and easily broken.

"'Tis a fine bairn, Jean," he said pleasantly, "ye may well be proud o' the babe. I wish I could bide wi' you. They might have left me alone this ae nicht. But I must mount and ride. Fare ye weel, Jean, my lass—braw lass and bonny wife ye ever were to me. I must e'en bit and saddle, for I hae a far gate and a gloomy road to travel this night!"

So with no more than this farewell to his wife and young bairn, the hope of the Stuarts, the scourge of the Covenant, the glory of the Grahams, lay dead on the clean-reaped field of victory.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE LEAGUER OF DUNKELD

THE leaders of the Highland army knew not for a while whether most to rejoice in the victory which the clans had won for the King, or to grieve for the terrible price which had been paid for it. The army of General Mackay had indeed been swept out of existence. The succours from the distant clans were daily pouring in. Scarlett had arrived with four hundred more of Lochiell's claymores. Ardnamurchan and Morven sent stalwart levies. The way seemed clear to Edinburgh, from whence there came tidings of stricken dismay among the followers of Hamilton, that mighty prince, and where only the Wild Whigs of the West stood firm, patrolling the city and keeping ill-doers in such fear as they had not known since Cromwell encamped betwixt the braes of Canaan and the swamp of Little Egypt.

But Great Dundee was dead, and that balanced all.

For able as were many of the chiefs, and well exercised in their clan warfare, there was not one of them, save it might be Lochiell, who was not jealous of every other.

And Colonel Cannon of the Irish levies, who by virtue of the King's commission held the nominal command, was a man who possessed the confidence of none.

So Wat Gordon, going from clan to clan on the

morning after the battle, found nothing but bickering and envies among the victors—how this one had obtained a greater share of the spoil than another, how Glengarry was threatening to cut off Lochiell for the ancient soreness betwixt them, and also because of some supposed favour of position on the day of battle.

"Tut, man," said Lochiell to his vapouring adversary, good-naturedly clapping him on the shoulder, "if you lads of the Garryside are so fighting keen, and as full of hot blood as you say, I doubt not but that a day or two will give you another opportunity of letting out a little of it against the common enemy."

Wat, eager as ever to put the great controversy to the arbitrament of battle, raged impotently, while Major Cannon wheeled and manœuvred the Irishmen through their drills, and carried on his miserable squabblings with the chiefs—whom, in spite of their mutual dislikes and clan jealousies, Dundee had held in leash with such a firm yet delicate hand.

Oftentimes, as day after day was wasted, Lochinvar felt that if only he could throw himself on the enemy in order if it might be to cut a way single-handed toward his love—even though he should be slain in the first hundred yards, such an end would be better than this unceasing plundering among allies and bickering between friends.

Nevertheless, the numbers of the Highland army kept up, though the ranks were in a continual state of flux. As for Scarlett, the master-at-arms was driven to distraction by the hopelessness of teaching the clansmen anything.

Things were daily passed over which, had Dundee been above ground, would in five minutes have brought out a firing party, and ended a man's days against a stone dyke.

Worst of all, while these precious days, when the whole force ought to have been advancing, were thus idly slipping by, the delay gave the Government time to play its strongest card. The fury and enthusiasm of the clans was now for the first time to be brought face to face with an enthusiasm fiercer, because stiller, than their own—with a courage equally great, but graver, sterner, and best of all, disciplined by years of trial and persecution.

The Cameronians, known throughout Scotland as the "Seven Thousand," had garrisoned Edinburgh during the fierce, troublous months of the Convention. When there was no other force in the country, they had stood between the Kingdom and anarchy. And now, when at last the Government of William was becoming better established, twelve hundred men of the Blue Banner formed themselves into a regiment —all stern, determined, much-enduring veterans, who had brought from their Westland homes a hatred of the Highlanders sharpened by memories of the Great Raid, when for months the most barbarous and savage clans had been quartered on the West and South, till the poor folk of Galloway and Ayr were fairly eaten up, and most of their hard-won gear vanished clean away into the trackless deserts of the North.

Now, in the anxious days that succeeded Killiekrankie, eight hundred of this Cameronian regiment had been ordered to Dunkeld, which was rightly supposed to be the post of danger. The other four hundred of the regiment had been sent to garrison Badenoch and to keep the West quiet; so that the young Covenanting commander, Cleland—a youth not yet in his twenty-eighth year—had but two-thirds of his regiment with him.

But such men as they were!—none like them had

been seen under arms since the Ironsides of Cromwell went back to their farm-steadings and forges.

It was no desirable stronghold which they were set to keep. Indeed, after a small experience of Dunkeld, the other regiments which had been sent under Lord Cardross to assist in driving back the enemy gladly departed for Perth. The town, they said, was completely indefensible. It was commanded on all sides by heights, even as Killiekrankie had been. The streets could readily be forced at a dozen points, and then every man would die miserably, like rats in a hole.

"Even so," said Cleland calmly to my Lord Cardross, "but I was bidden to hold this town and no other, and here I and those with me will bide until we die."

And, as is not the case with many a valiant commander's boast, he made his words good.

It was a very considerable army which gathered about the devoted Cameronians—not less than five thousand victorious clansmen, under a leader of experience, if not of well-proven parts.

Wat was still with Lochiell, and Scarlett, in deep disgust at Keppoch's miscellaneous plunderings, drew his sword also with the same chief.

By early morning the town was completely surrounded and the attack began. But the brave band of Wild Whigs of the West stuck dourly to their outposts, and for an hour or more their little handfuls defied behind the walls of town-yards and ruinous petty enclosures all the assaults of the clansmen. At last these inconsiderable outer defences were driven in, the whole regiment was shut up in the cathedral and in an adjoining house of many unglazed windows, which was standing roofed but unfinished close at hand.

Here the grim men of the South, doggedly saying their prayers behind their clenched teeth, met and turned every assault, taking aim at their assailants with the utmost composure and certainty.

Clan after clan charged down upon those crumbling walls. Rush after rush of plaided men melted before that deadly storm of bullets. Thrice Wat, in the thick of Lochiell's men, dashed at the defences. Thrice was he carried back by the wave of tartan which recoiled from the reeking muskets of the men of the Covenant.

Glengarry fell wounded. The McDonalds broke. Then in the nick of time the McLeans dashed into the thick of the fight, and had almost won the wall when young Cleland, rushing across the court to meet them in person, was struck by two bullets—one through his head, the other in his side. In spite of his agony he set his hand to his brow and staggered towards the interior of the church crying, "Have at them, lads; all is well with me!" This he said in order to conceal his wound from his men. But he fell dead or ever he reached the door.

The lead for the muskets began to give out. But in a moment there were men on the roof of the new building, stripping off the metal, while others beneath were melting it and thrusting the bullets yet warm from the "cams" into their hotter barrels, or cutting the sheets of lead into rough slugs to fire at the enemy.

So relentlessly, hour by hour, the struggle went on. Ever as the attacks failed, fresh clans tried their fierce courage in emulous assault, firing once, throwing away their guns, and then charging home with the claymore.

But these Cameronians were no levies roughly disciplined and driven in chains to the battlefield.

Men of the moors and the moss-hags were they—good at the prayer, better at the musket, best of all with the steady eye which directed the unshaken hand, and the quiet heart within dourly certain of victory and of the righteousness of its cause.

Clan by clan, the very men who had swept Mackay's troops into the Garry, fell back shattered and dismayed from the broken defences of the Hill Folk. In vain the war-pipes brayed; in vain a thousand throats cried "Claymore!" In vain Lochiell's men drave for the fourth time desperately at the wall. From within came no noise, save the clatter of the musket-shots running the circuit of the defences, or the dull thud as a man fell over in the ranks or collapsed like a shut telescope in his place —not a groan from the wounded, as men stricken to death drew themselves desperately up to get a last shot at the enemies of Christ's Cause and Covenant, that they might face God contentedly with their duty done and all their powder spent.

Left almost alone in the fierce ebb of the fourth assault, Wat had gained the top of the wall when a sudden blow on the head stunned him. He fell inward among the wounded and dying men of the defenders and there lay motionless, while outside the last charge of the baffled clansmen broke on the stubborn hodden grey of the Cameronian regiment, vainly as the water of the ninth wave breaks on the cliffs that look out to the Atlantic.

The chiefs still tried to rally their men. Cannon offered to lead them again to the assault in person. But it might not be.

"We can fight men," they said, as they fell back sullenly, "but these are devils incarnate."

CHAPTER XLVII

THE GOLDEN HEART

WHEN Wat Gordon opened his eyes, he looked into a face he knew right well.

"Faith, Will, is it time to get up already?" he said, thinking his cousin and he were off together on some ploy of ancient days—for a morning's fishing on the hills above Knockman, mayhap.

For his cousin Will it was indeed who stood before him, clad in the worn and smoke-begrimed uniform of the Regiment of the Covenant.

"Wat, Wat, how came you here, lad?" cried Will Gordon.

A gleam of his ancient wilfulness beaconed a moment in Wat's eye.

"Why—over the wall there," he said; "I was in somewhat of a hurry and I had not time to go round by the gate and tirl at the pin."

And with that something buzzed drowsily in his ears like a prisoned bluebottle, and he fainted again.

Lucky it was for Wat Gordon that Sir Robert Hamilton did not command the regiment, and that the dead Cleland had instilled his humane principles into those under him. For the officers merely ordered their prisoner to be carried along with their own wounded to a convenient house in the town, and there to be warded till he should be well enough to be remitted to Edinburgh.

To this hospital Will Gordon came to see him often, and give him what heartening he might; but it was not till the seventh day, when Wat showed some promise of early recovery, that Will, with a mighty serious face, showed him a trinket in the palm of his hand.

"Ken ye that?" he asked.

"'Tis Kate's token that she was to send me if she needed me. Where got ye it, Will?"

And even as he spoke these words Wat was half out of bed in his eagerness, but Will took him in his arms with gentle firmness and pressed him back upon the pillow.

"Bide a wee," he said; "ye will do no good that way. Ye are far too weak to travel, and there is a strong guard at the door. Listen! I got the gold heart from Kate herself, and she bade me tell you that if ye could not come to her by the tenth day of September, ye would never need to come at all."

"What means that message, Will? Tell me truly," said Wat, white to the lips, yet sitting up calmly in spite of his deadly weakness and the curious singing drone in his ears.

"They have worked upon her to weariness, I think," said Will, a little sadly; "worked upon her with tales of your unfaithfulness, which, to do her justice, she would scorn to believe—told her that her father's very life depends upon the marriage, because of the old friendship and succour he had from Claverhouse; wearied her out, till the lass knows not which way to turn. And so she has consented to be wedded to my Lord Barra on the tenth of September. But as Maisie judges, our Kate will die rather than marry any man she hates."

Wat leaped out of bed and began to dress himself.

"Let me go, Will—let me alone! Hands off—do

not touch me, or I will strike you on the face. Only ten days—and so far to go! But I will fight my way through. I am strong and well, I tell you——"

And with that Will Gordon laid him back again upon the bed like a child.

"Wat," he said, "I am with you in this, since Kate loves you and Maisie bids me. (You have never asked of her welfare, but no matter.) I have gotten Jack Scarlett here by me in the town. We will arrange your escape, and get you horses. But you must be a deal stronger than you are ere you are ready to travel, and at least you must abide here yet three days."

"Three days, Will; 'tis plainly impossible! I should die stark raving mad of the waiting and anxiety. Better let me go, Will, this very night."

And almost for very weariness and the sense of powerlessness in the grip of fate, Wat could have wept; but a thought and a resolve steadied him.

From that moment he began, as it were obediently, to talk of indifferent things, and Will humoured him, well pleased that it should be so. Ere he departed, Will said, "I will bring Scarlett to your window to-night. Do you speak with him for a moment and let him go."

Wat smilingly promised, and went on to tell of his winter adventures among the clans, as if they were all he thought about.

"Good-night and a sweet sleep to you, Wat, lad!" said Will Gordon. "In three days, I promise you, you shall ride forth, well mounted and equipped."

And so, smiling once more on his cousin, he went down the stair.

Then Wat Gordon laid his head on the pillow as obediently as a child.

But he only kept it there till his cousin was out of

the room and he heard his footsteps die down the street. In a trice he was out of bed and trying all the fastenings of the windows of his room. He was alone in his dormitory, but on either side of him were rooms containing wounded men of the Cameronians, to whom night nurses came and went, so that it behoved him to be wary.

One of the windows was barred with iron outside, while the sash of the other was fixed and would not open at all.

Wat threw open the barred window as far as he could and shook the iron lattice. It held firm against his feeble strength, but upon a more minute examination the stanchions seemed only to be set in plaster.

"That's better; but I wish Jack Scarlett would come!" murmured Wat, as he staggered back to his bed. He kissed his hand towards the South with something of his old air of gallant recklessness.

"On the tenth I shall be with you, dear love, to redeem my pledge, or else——"

But before his lips could frame the alternative he had fainted on the floor.

Scarlett came to Lochinvar's window when the night was darkest, a little before midnight.

"Wat," he cried softly; "Wat Gordon!"

Wat was already at the lattice and promptly reached his hand out to his ancient comrade.

"Jack," he whispered hoarsely, "for God's sake get me out of this hole! They would shut me up here for three days, till she is married to the devil Barra. And she has sent me the token—the heart of gold. I have it here. You mind it was to be the fiery cross betwixt us two? She is needing me and I must go. Break down the window bars, good Jack, and let me out."

"But your cousin says that you are not fit to travel, that you will never reach Galloway unless you have some rest before you go. Besides, it will take some time to purchase horses for the long journey——"

"I cannot wait, Jack," interrupted Wat fiercely; "I shall die here in three days if I stay. How can I wait with the greedy talons of the monster drawing nearer to my lass? See, Jack, I have thirty guineas in my belt. I will leave twenty of them in any horse's stall in the stables. And, God knows! it is not the officers of the Cameronian regiment who have horses worth half so much. Try the bars, good Jack, and let me out."

Scarlett endeavoured to reason with him, to dissuade him from the venture for that night at least.

"To-morrow, Lochinvar; only one night—we shall wait but to see what to-morrow brings."

"Scarlett, look you here," Wat said earnestly, his face gleaming ghastly through the lattice in the steely glint of stars. "You know whether or not I am a man of my word. I have a dagger here—hid in the leather of my boot. Now, if you do not help me to escape to-night, 'fore the Lord, Jack, I will let out my soul or the morning—and my blood will be on your head."

He leaned out till his agony-wet brow touched the bars. His fingers clutched and shook them in his desperation.

"Well," said Scarlett, half to himself, "I will e'en do it, since it must be so. But it will prove a sorry job for us all. 'Tis but taking the poor laddie's life in another way."

So, vanishing for a tale of minutes which seemed hours to the pale, wounded, half-frenzied figure at the window, he returned with a "geleck" or iron crowbar, with which he promptly started work on the lime and plaster of the stanchions. It was not long before

he loosened one and then another. Once or twice he had to cower down in order to escape the lanterns of the patrol—for, unlike the clans, the Cameronians kept excellent watch; but in half an hour his task was completed.

"The Lord forgie me, laddie, for this!" he said, as he helped Wat out, and felt the palms of his hands burning hot, while his body was shaking with feverish cold.

"Now help me to get a horse!" said Wat, as soon as they stood in safety under the ruined walls of the cathedral. "There are the stables of the officers' horses. Come, let us go over yonder."

"It 's a rope's end at ony rate," said Scarlett; "old Jack has been at mony ploys, but he never was a horse-thief before!"

"How did we get away from the city of Amersfort, tell me, Jack?" said Wat, with a touch of his ancient humour, being pleased at getting his will.

"Ah, but then a woman did the stealing for love, as you do now. It is different with me, that have no love to steal for—or to die for either," he added sadly.

Wat put his hand affectionately on the shoulder of the old free-lance.

"Even so do you steal, old bear," he said, gently patting him; "you do it for love of me."

"I declare," quoth Scarlett with relief in his voice, "I believe I do. Guid kens what there is aboot ye, laddie, that makes both lassies and auld grizzle-pates run their heads into holes and their necks into tow-ropes for the love o' ye!"

The stables had been left completely unguarded, for it was the officers' boast that they desired not any greater safety than their men. Cleland, indeed, had once ordered all the officers' horses to be brought out

and shot, just because some of the soldiers complained that the officers had a greater chance of escape than they.

Since that time the horses had been permitted to remain in the not too zealous care of the grooms, who fulfilled their duty by sleeping in the town at a distance from their charges.

Even the very stable door was unlocked, and as they opened it the horses were heard restlessly moving within.

"Any of Keppoch's gay lads might make a haul very easily this nicht," said Scarlett as they entered.

"I saw Keppoch and many another pretty fighter get his bellyful over there by the walls the other day," said Wat grimly, as he proceeded coolly to make his selection by the sense of touch alone.

When he had done this, Scarlett and he saddled the chosen beast and led him out, having previously tied stable rags over his iron-shod feet to keep them from clanking on the pavement. Making a detour they soon gained the river, which they skirted cautiously till they were a mile from the town. Then Wat mounted without the assistance of his companion.

"God help ye, laddie; ye will never win near your lass, I fear me. But ye can try. And that is aye the best o't in this world. That it is for us mortals to do the trying, and for God to finish ilka job to His ain liking."

With which sage reflection he gave Wat his sword, his pistols and ammunition, together with some bread for the journey—looking at which last, Wat felt that he could as soon eat his horse's tail.

"Hae!" said the master-at-arms, "ye will be the better o' that or ye come to the end o' the Lang Wood. I have plenty more by me."

Wat laughed.

"You cannot deceive a desperate man," he said, "nor yet lie to him. Well do I know that this is every bite you have in the world."

"Listen, Wat," said the free-lance. "I have found me a decent woman that has ta'en a liking to me, and she has ta'en me in. I 'm weel provided for. Tak' them, laddie, tak' them. Ye will need them mair nor me."

Saying which Scarlett started promptly on the back track to the town, crying as he went: "God speed ye, laddie; I 'll never set een on ye mair!"

So with a sob in his throat and a feeling as if he were riding on empty air, Wat Gordon turned the head of the officer's charger (by a strange and fitting chance it was his cousin Will's), and set his chest to the current of the river, at the place where the tracks on the shoaling gravel and the chuckling of the shallow river over its pebbles indicated a ford.

So our true hero, ill, fevered, desperate, in the stark grip with death, started on his almost impossible quest—without an idea or a plan save that he must ride into the blank midnight to save his love, or die for her.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE MASTER COMES HOME

AND what in all the annals of romantic adventure could be found more utterly hopeless than Wat Gordon's quest? He was doubly outlawed. For not only had James Stuart proclaimed him outlaw, but he had been out with the enemies of the Prince of Orange, now King William the Third of Great Britain and Ireland. He had fought at Killiekrankie and Dunkeld. He had ridden through all the north country at Dundee's bridle-rein. He was a fugitive from a military prison in the Prince's own province of the Netherlands. He possessed but ten golden guineas in the world. His ancestral tower of Lochinvar was little better than a dismantled fortalice. And then as to his quest, he went to seek his love in her home, to rescue her from among her friends, and from the midst of the retainers of her father's estate, and those more numerous and reckless riders who had come with my lady the Duchess from the Grenoch. Doubtless, also, my Lord of Barra would bring with him a great attendance of his friends. The chances against Lochinvar's success were infinite. Another man would have given up in despair, but in the mind of Wat Gordon there was only one thought: "She called me and I will go to her. Though I am traitor and outlaw alike to the King-over-the-water and the Prince at Whitehall; proscribed alike by white rose

and orange lily, I am yet all true to Kate and to love."

The desperate, unutterable details of that great mad journey can never be written down. For even Wat himself, in after days, scarce remembered how, when one horse was wearied, he managed to exchange it for another and ride on—sometimes salving his conscience by leaving to the owner one of his dwindling golden guineas; or how he was attacked by footpads and escaped, having cut down one and frightened the other into delivering over (in trust, as it were, for King James) every stiver of his ill-gotten gains—poor crazed Wat meanwhile tossing his fevered head and wavering a pistol before the knave's astonished eyes as he bade him stand and deliver.

"'Tis a lesson to you," said Wat didactically; "ye will thank me for it one day when ye lie down to die a clean-straw death instead of dancing your last on a gallows, with the lads crying your dying speech beneath your very feet as ye dangle over the Grass-market."

How he wan through with bare life Wat never knew; nor yet with what decent householders he had negotiated exchange of horses without their consent. For long years afterwards, whenever Wat was a little feverish, scraps of conversations used to return to him, and forgotten incidents flashed clear upon him, which he knew must have happened during these terrible last days ere, with the homing instinct of a wounded animal chased desperately by the hunters, he reached the little grey tower of Lochinvar set lonely in the midst of its moorland loch. Sometimes on the Edinburgh streets in after years he stumbled unexpectedly on a face he recognised. A countryman newly come into market would set his hands on his hips and stare

earnestly up at him. Then Wat would say to himself, "There goes a creditor of mine; I wonder if I gave him a better horse than I took, or if he wants to claim the balance now."

But who in the great lord of Parliament could spy out the white-faced, desperate lad—half-hero, half-highwayman—whose supple sword flashed like the waving of a willow wand, and whose cocked pistol was in his fingers at the faintest hint of opposition?

It was evening of a great, solemn, serene September day when Wat reached the edges of the loch, upon the little island in the midst of which stood the ancestral tower of his forebears. There was no smoke going up from its chimneys. The water slept black from the very margin, deeply stained with peat. The midges danced and balanced; the moor-birds cried; the old owl hooted from the gables; the retired stars twinkled reticently above, just as they had done in Wat's youth. A strange fancy came over him. He had come home from market at Dumfries. Presently his father would cry down to him from his chamber what was the price of sheep on the Plainstones that day, and if that behindhand rascal, Andrew Sim of Gordieston, had paid his rent yet. His mother——

Ah, but wait; he had no father! He had seen his father's head over the port of Edinburgh, and something, he could not remember what, happened after that. Had he not buried his mother in the green kirkyard of Dalry? What, then, had he come home for? There was some one he loved in danger—some one with eyes deep as the depths of the still and gloomy waters that encircled Lochinvar.

Ah, now he remembered—the heart, Kate's heart of gold! It was safe in his bosom. Ten days' grace when he left his cousin Will! But had he ridden

five days or fifty? Sometimes it seemed but one day, and sometimes an eternity, since he rode away from Jack Scarlett at the ford above Dunkeld.

What was that noise? An enemy? Wat clutched his sword instinctively. No, nothing more than his poor horse, the last incarnation of his cousin Will's charger, with which he had left the stables of Dunkeld.

The poor beast had tried to drink of the peaty brew of the loch, but what with the fatigue and the rough riding, it had fallen forward, with its nose in the shallows, and now lay breathing out its last in rattling gasps.

Wat stooped and patted the flaccid neck as the spasms relaxed and it rolled to the side.

"Poor thing—poor thing—ye are well away. Maybe there is a heaven for horses also, where the spirit of the beast may find the green eternal pastures, where the rein does not curb and the saddle leather never galls."

So saying Wat divested himself of his arms and upper clothing. He rolled them up, and put them with the saddle and equipment of his dead horse in the safe shelter of a moss-hag. Then, with a last kiss to the gold heart, he dropped silently into the water and swam out towards the island on which the old blockhouse stood.

Five minutes later Walter Gordon, Lord of Lochinvar, white as death, dripping from head to foot as if the sea had indeed given up its dead, stood on the threshold of the house of his fathers. The Master had come home.

The little grey keep on its lonely islet towering above him seemed not so high as of old. It was strangely shrunken. The isle, too, had grown smaller to his travelled eye—probably was so, indeed,

for the water had for many years been encroaching on the narrow insulated policies of the tower of Lochinvar.

There to his right was the granite "snibbing-post," to which the boat was usually tied. The pillar had, he remembered, a hole bored through the head of it with a chip knocked out of the side—for making which with a hammer he had been soundly cuffed by his father. And there was the anchored household boat itself, nodding and rocking a little under the northern castle wall, where it descended abruptly into the deeps of the loch.

Wat stood under the carved archway and clattered on the door with a stone picked from the water-side. For the great brass knocker which he remembered had been torn off, no doubt during the troubles which had arisen after Wat himself had been attainted for the wounding of his Grace the Duke of Wellwood.

It was long indeed ere any one came to answer the summons, and meanwhile Wat stood, dripping and shaking, consumed with a deadly weakness, yet conscious of a still more deadly strength. If God would only help him ever so little, he thought—grant him but one night's quiet rest, he could yet do all that which he had come so fast and so far to accomplish.

At last he heard a stir in the tower above. A footstep came steadily and lightly along the stone passages. The thin gleam of a rushlight penetrated beneath the door, and shed a solid ray through the great worn key-hole. The bolts growled and screeched rustily, as if complaining at being so untimely disturbed. The door opened, and there before Wat stood a sweet, placid-browed old lady in the laced cap and stomacher of the ancient days.

"Jean!" he cried, "Jean Gordon, here is your laddie come hame." He spoke just as he had done more than twenty years ago, when many a time he had fallen out with his mother, and betaken himself to the sanctuary of Jean's Wa's by the side of the Garpel Glen.

For Jean Gordon it was, the recluse of the Holy Linn, his cousin Will's ancient nurse and kinswoman, and to them both the kindliest and most lovely old maid in the world.

"Wi' laddie, laddie, what has gotten ye? Ye are a' white and shakin', dripping wet too; come ben and get a change and let me put ye to your bed."

"What day of the month is this?" cried Wat eagerly, even before he had crossed the threshold.

"Laddie, what should auld Jean Gordon ken aboot times and seasons? Nocht ava—ye couldna expect it. But there is a decent man in the kitchen that mayhap can tell ye—Peter McCaskill, the Curate o' Dalry, puir body. He was sorely in fear of being rabbled by the Hill Folk, so he cam' his ways here, silly body. There's no' a man in the country-side wad hae laid hand on him—if he would just say his prayer withoot the book, gie his bit sermon, and stop havering aboot King Jamie—at least till he comes to his ain again."

Thus gossiping to keep up Wat Gordon's spirits, the ancient dame led the way down the passages, with a foot that was yet light upon the heather, though seventy years scarcely counted up all her mortal span.

"Clerk McCaskill," cried Jean, "ye'll mind maister Walter? Rise up and welcome him! For it is in his hoose that ye are sheltered, and indeed his very ale that ye are drinkin' at this moment."

Peter McCaskill rose to his feet and held out his hand to Wat. He was dressed apparently in the same ancient green surtout he had worn in the year of Bothwell—a garment which seemed never to get any worse, nor yet to drop piecemeal from his shoulders with age, but to renew itself from decade to decade in a decrepit but evergreen youth.

"I am rejoiced to see you in your ain castle, my Lord," said the curate ceremoniously. Then, catching sight of the pale, desperate face, he exclaimed in a different tone, "Preserve us, laddie, what has ta'en ye? Hae ye slain a man to his wounding—a young man to his hurt? Are the dead-runners on your track?"

For indeed Wat stood like a wild thing, hard beset by the hunters, which at the last has turned to bay in its lair.

But Wat put aside all questionings with a wave of his hand, a movement which had something of his old swift recklessness in it, as of the days when they named him the Wildcat of Lochinvar.

"Tell me the day of the month," he gasped, as he stood there in the midst of the floor before the fire of logs which burned on the irons of the houseplace, swaying a little on his feet, and ever checking himself like a man drunken with wine.

The curate took a little calendar from his pocket—a record of saints' days and services, but interspersed with the reckonings of ale-houses and the scores of cock-fightings.

"'Tis the eve of the eighth day of September," he said, moistening his plump thumb to turn over the leaf that he might not be mistaken in the month.

"Thank God, I have yet two days!" cried Wat, and fell forward upon the shoulder of the curate.

CHAPTER XLIX

THE CURATE OF DALRY

PETER MCCASKILL received the weight deftly, as though he had been accustomed all his life to be charged down upon without a moment's notice by unconscious men.

"Easy does it, my Lord," he said; "ye will soon be better. He 's been ower-taken, ye see—a wee drappie does it on an empty stomach," he explained to Jean Gordon. "Often hae I warned my folk—aye, even frae the pulpit, the very horns o' the altar, as it were—no' to tak' drink on an empty stomach!"

"Empty fiddlestick! Lay the laddie here!" cried Jean Gordon; "do ye no' see that the lad is deein' on his feet? He hasna seen drink for weeks, I 'll wager —no, nor Christian meat either, by a' appearances."

She stopped to take off his boots. The soaked remnants of the sole came away in her hand.

"Mercy!" she cried, "the poor lad maun hae been in sore want. Tak' haud o' him soothly and tentily, Peter."

And so the kindly old lady, peering closely with her dim, short-sighted eyes, and the burly, red-gilled curate, undressed Wat Gordon gently, and laid him in the bed on which his mother had died—the flanking pillars of which were hacked with the swords of the troopers from Carsphairn who had come to seek him after the sentence of outlawry.

"Peety me!" said Jean Gordon, "what will we do wi' the puir laddie? I 'll get him some broth gin he can tak' them."

So in a trice Wat, having come a little to himself, was sitting up and taking "guid broth o' the very best, wi' a beef-bane boiled to ribbons intil't," as Jean Gordon nominated the savoury stew, while she sat on the bed and fed him in mouthfuls with the only silver spoon Grier of Lag had left in the once well-plenished house of Lochinvar.

Wat sat fingering his gold heart and looking about him. He seemed like a man who has risen to the surface, and finds himself unexpectedly in a boat after a nightmare experience of death in perilous deeps of the sea.

"Is there a horse about the house?" queried Wat presently, looking at Jean Gordon out of his hollow, purple-rimmed eyes.

She thought that he still dreamed or doted.

"A horse, my laddie," she cried, "how should there be a horse aboot the house of Lochinvar? The stables were never so extensive that I heard o'; and troth, Rob Grier o' Lag, deil's lick-pot that he is, has no' left mony aboot the estates. There 's a plough-horse ower by Gordiestoun, if that 's what ye want."

And in her heart she said, "It 's a lee, Guid forgie me. But onything to pacify the lad and get him a sleep."

"I ken the best horse in a' this country-side," said the curate, going back to his ale, as if nothing had happened, "and that 's muckle Sandy Gordon's chairger ower at the Earlstoun. He 's roarin' at the Convention in Edinburgh, I 'se warrant, and he 'll no' need 'Drumclog.' Gin ye hae a notion of the beast, I can borrow him for ye."

Wat started up with eager eyes.

"On the morning of the tenth have the horse at the lochside, and I shall be for ever bound and obligated to ye."

The curate nodded his head like one that grants the smallest and easiest favour.

"It shall be done; by six o' the clock Drumclog will be there, or my name is not Peter Mac—— Eh! what is't, woman?" he exclaimed, turning a little testily to Jean Gordon, who for the last minute had been nudging him vehemently with her elbow to be quiet. "I 'll no' haud my tongue for a bletherin' auld wretch. I hae held my tongue ower often in this pairish. Gin the lad wants a horse, e'en let him hae a horse. It is ane o' the best symptoms that I ken o'. I mind weel, yince when I was a laddie like him and in love——."

But the reminiscence of Peter McCaskill's early love was not destined to be recorded, at least in this place, for Jean Gordon took the matter into her own hands and pushed the indignant curate out of the room. But even as he went he turned in the doorway and said, "Bide ye still in your bed the day, laddie. Ye shall find muckle Sandy Gordon's horse, Drumclog, at the west landing on the mornin' o' the tenth."

"Deil a fear o' ye," muttered Jean Gordon, "ye 'll lie doucely and quietly in your bed till Jean gies ye leave to rise—tenth or no tenth!"

. . . . . .

Then sleep descended like a brown hissing cloud upon the tortured soul and weary body of Wat Gordon, and deep, dreamless, billowy oblivion held him till the morrow. It was ten of the clock when he awoke, with a frenzied start, demanding how long he had slept.

Jean Gordon, in whose hands was the morning porridge-spurtle (and, as it were, the care of all the churches), tried the method of sarcasm.

"Weel, laddie," she said, "ye juist cam' here yestreen, and gin yesterday was the eighth, as Peter telled ye, ye will maybe be able to mak' oot that this will be the ninth. And come off the dead-cauld flags this instant with your bare feet, and you in a pour of sweat. There's nae sense ava in the callant! What are ye in sic a fyke for aboot the tenth and the tenth? Are the eleventh and the twelfth no' as guid days? Did the same Lord no' make them a'?"

Wat went back obediently to bed.

"Mind," he said, "if you are lying to me, you shall fry in hell-fire for that lie. For a man's life and soul are on your truth."

"The boy's fair dementit," cried Jean; "what for should auld Jean Gordon lee to him? Tell me your trouble, laddie," she said, going nearer to him. "For I 've had trouble o' my ain a' my life, and weel I ken there are few things so evil that they canna be mended—that is, if ye are minded to stroke them the richt way o' the hair."

At this point Peter McCaskill was heard shuffling along the passage, but Jean was over quick for him. She rose and very promptly and unceremoniously shut the door in his face.

"Gae 'way wi' ye the noo, Peter," she said peremptorily; "tak' the fish-pole and fetch in a fry o' trouts for the breakfast. Ye 'll get naething else to eat gin ye dinna."

"Noo, laddie," she said, sitting down beside Wat, with a world of sympathetic invitation in her voice, 'tell me a' your heart's trouble."

So, with a great sense of relief, Wat told the tale

to the old lady, whose own love-trouble of fifty years before had kept her maiden all her life.

As he spoke Jean stroked the hand which hung over the edge of the bed.

"Laddie, my laddie!" were all the articulate words she said, but she soothed Wat with a little, low continuous murmur of sound as he fretted and fumed at his helplessness.

"Ye shall get your lass—fear ye not that," she said, when he had finished. "I hae heard o' the wedding. They say the lass does naething but bide in her chamber and greet. She has fallen away to a shadow. But be that as it may, there is a great repair o' folk to the house o' Balmaghie. I saw a heap o' the queer, daftlike folk o' the north riding by, wi' feathers in their checked bonnets, and tartan trews on their hurdies—aye, trews of bonny tartan claith—ye never saw the like. But ye shall hae your lass, were it only to spite the menseless crew. Peter and me will help ye to her."

In what manner Jean Gordon was to help him Wat Gordon knew not—nor, for the matter of that, Peter McCaskill either—save by getting him the loan of his cousin Sandy's horse, and even that might be a Highlandman's loan—taken without the asking. But Wat said nothing, only laid him down contentedly, while Jean Gordon set off to provide the breakfast she had so abruptly denied to the curate.

Presently Peter came in with his trouts, for in the Loch of Lochinvar the spotted beauties were infinitely less shy and infrequent than in later days they have become.

"*Benedictus benedicat!*" quoth Peter, who knew his Latin by ear, and sat him down.

"That's a daft heathen-like grace," said Jean; "I

shouldna wonder gin the folks did rabble ye and tear your white clouts ower your head, if ye gied them balderdash like that in the pulpit."

The curate smiled a wry discomfortable smile at the prophecy, but nevertheless he proceeded to take his breakfast with some fortitude, looking up occasionally to see that the trouts did not burn as they made a pleasant skirling noise in the pan.

"There's nocht like a loch trout newly catched, in a' this bonny God's warld," he said. "I wonder how men can be haythens and ill-doers when there's sic braw loch trout in Gallowa'! And burn trout are just as guid—in fact, there's some that actually prefers them!"

All this day Jean Gordon might have been heard in solemn confabulation with the curate, while Wat lay and listened to the din of their voices, sometimes uplifted in controversy, sometimes hushed in gossip, but ever coming to him pleasantly dulled and harmonised through the thick walls and long echoing passages of the house of Lochinvar. It was a windy day also, and the water sang him a lullaby of his childhood, as it lapped and swished all about him, with a noise like the leafy boughs of trees brushing against the foundations of his ancient castle.

"To-morrow! To-morrow! To-morrow!" said Wat, over and over to himself. "To-morrow my die will be cast for life or death."

CHAPTER L

LOCHINVAR KEEPS TRYST

THE morning of the tenth came—still, uncoloured below, rising to greyish-blue above, rose-rimmed only along the eastern horizon. The reapers were out in the high fields about Gordonstoun by daybreak, with their crooked reaping-hooks in their hands, busily grasping the handfuls of grain and cutting them through with a pleasant "risp" of sound. Cocks crowed early that morning, for they knew it was going to be a day of fervent heat. It would be as well therefore to have the pursuit of slippery worm and rampant caterpillar over betimes in the dawning. Then each chanticleer could stand in the shade and scratch himself applausively with alternate foot all the hot noontide, while his wives clucked and nestled in the dusty holes along the banks, interchanging intimate reflections upon the moral character of the giddier and more skittish young pullets of the farmyard.

But long after the sun had risen Wat Gordon lay asleep. Jean Gordon had a suit of clothes lying ready brushed for him on a chair—frilled linen, lace so cobwebby and fine, that it seemed to be spun from the foam of the loch after a storm. His father's sword swung by a belt of faded scarlet leather from the oaken angle of the nearest chair-back.

"I 'll gie him half an hour yet," said she; "Peter

will no' be here wi' Sandy Gordon's muckle horse before that time."

The minutes passed slowly. Jean opened the window of the tower, and the fresh air of the moorland stole in. Wat Gordon lay on his pillow knitting his brows and working his hands as if in grips with some deadly problem that lacked a solution.

"Puir lad, puir lad, whatna kittle thing love is!" murmured the old lady; "it works us, it drives us, and it harls us. It grieves us and gars us greet. And yet, what wad life be without it and the memory o't! And 'tis Jean Gordon that should ken, for she has lived sixty years on the memory o' ae bonny month o' maist heavenly bliss."

At last she bent over him, hearing a loud and piercing whistle from the shore of the loch.

"My lamb, my lamb!" she whispered fondly, "rise ye, for your love's sake. Here are your claes. Gang forth like a bridegroom rejoicing in your strength. Ye shallna gang menseless this day, though ye hae to ride on another man's horse. The time will come when ye shall hae mony braw plenished stables o' your ain."

Obediently Wat rose and put the fine clothes on him with a kind of wonder. He was still pale and wan, and his body was wasted by suffering and recent privation. Nevertheless he felt his head clear, and there was an elastic ease in all his sinews.

"To-day," he said to himself gladly, "to-day I cast the die for love or death."

The curate came for him in the boat, and Jean Gordon accompanied them.

"I am loath to part," she said; "it was aye a kindly Galloway custom to convoy the lad ye liked best, and Guid kens that's Wat Gordon o' Lochinvar."

"What do three horses there?" asked Wat, as they rowed the boat over to the landing-place, where a black charger and two humbler shelties were tethered close together among the dwarf moorland birches.

"'Tis a grand day for pleasuring," said Jean, "and Peter and me have made it up to ride together to the Three Thorns o' Carlinwark by the end o' the loch. There ye will find us gin ye need us. Ye will hae to ride that gate onyway, gin ye win clear o' the house o' Balmaghie with life and good fortune."

Wat mounted his cousin's horse Drumclog, a mighty black of rare paces, which, in spite of his size, on firm ground could distance any steed in the Stewartry—aye, and as far as to Gretna on the borderside.

Now when Wat Gordon turned to ride away, sitting erect on his black horse, there came a light of almost maiden's love into Jean Gordon's eye.

"Never was there bride couched beside bridegroom like him!" she exclaimed proudly. "Win her or lose her, it will be the height o' pride to the young lass all her life long, that on a day she had such a lover to venture all for her sake."

And indeed, despite the wild eye, sunk in its rim of darkest purple, despite the hollow cheek and pale face of his wandering, well might she say it. For no such cavalier as Walter Gordon, Lord of Lochinvar and Gordonstoun, that day took the eyes of ladies in all broad Scotland. Doubly outlawed as he was—rebel, landless, friendless, penniless—there was yet something about the lad which carried hearts before him as the wind carries dandelion spray. And many a high dame and many a much-courted maiden had left her all that day to have followed him through the world at a waft of his right hand.

A coat of fine blue cloth set Walter Gordon well. A light cape of the same was bound over it, having a broad, rough hem of gold. His father's sword swung by his side. The sash and star of King James' order shone on his breast as the wind blew back his cloak. Knee-breeches of corded leather and cavalier's riding-boots completed his attire, while a broad hat, white feathered for loyalty and trimmed with blue and gold, was on his head.

"Aye, there gangs the leal heart," said Jean Gordon, wiping her dim eyes that she might watch him the longer; "there gangs the bonny laddie. There rides Wat Gordon, the only true lover—the lad that is ready to lay doon his life for his dear, lightly as a man sets on the board an empty cup after that he has drunken. Wae's me that sax inches o' steel in the back, or a pistol bullet at ten paces, should have power to lay a' that beauty low in the dust!"

. . . . . .

The holms and woodland spaces of Balmaghie were indeed a sight to see that glorious morn of the tenth of September, in the year of Christ, His Grace, 1689. There was scarce accommodation in the wide stables of the mansion for the horses of the guests. The very byres were crowded with them. The kye were milked on the edge of the wood to give the horses stalling-room in their places. As for Mistress Crombie, she was nearly driven out of her wits by the foreign cooks whom the new lady of the house had brought with her—some of them from Edinburgh and some of them all the way from London itself—to do justice to the great occasion.

Alisoun Begbie had a host of assistants. Every gentleman's house in the neighbourhood had supplied

its quota—given willingly, too, for there was no saying how soon the time might come to solicit an equivalent, either from the social kindness of the great lady of Balmaghie, or from the important political influence of the bridegroom, Murdo, Lord of Barra and the Small Isles.

Down the moorland road, by the side of which the humble-bees were droning in the heather bushes, and the blithe blackcock spreading his wings and crowing as if the spring had come again, yet another guest was riding to the wedding—and one, too, arrayed in the wedding garment.

Wat Gordon of Lochinvar flashed like a dragon-fly in gay apparel above the lily-clad pools of Loch Ken. But he had no invitation—no "Haste-to-the-Wedding" —unless, perhaps, the little heart of gold which he carried in his breast could be accounted such a summons. He rode slowly, often walking his horse long distances, like one who is not anxious to arrive over early at an important meeting-place. After he had passed the Bridge of New Galloway, and had ridden, to the astonishment and delight of those early astir in the ancient borough town, down the long, straggling, pig-haunted street, he dismounted and allowed his horse to walk by the lochside, and even at intervals to crop the sweet grasses of the roadside.

Yet it was from no consuming admiration of the supreme beauties of that fair pathway that Wat Gordon lagged so long upon it that September morn. To no purpose the loch rippled its deepest blue for him. In vain the heather ran back in league on league of red and purple bloom to the uttermost horizon, that Bennan frowned grimly above, and that the Black Craig of Dee fulfilled the promise of its name in gloomy majesty against the western sky.

For Wat Gordon kept his pale face turned anxiously on his charger.

"Ah, Drumclog," he said, thinking aloud, "thou art a Whig's horse, but if ever thou didst carry a cavalier on a desperate quest, it is surely this fair morning. Speed to thy legs, nimbleness to thy feet, for thou carriest more than the life of one this day."

CHAPTER LI

THE BRIDE'S LOVING-CUP

BUT just at the weary traverse across the moor of the Bennan, after the shining levels of Loch Ken were left behind, and before the sylvan quietnesses of the Lane of Grenoch had been encountered, Wat Gordon came suddenly on a troop of cavalry that rode northward, tinkling spur and jingling bit. So long had the country folk of Galloway been in the habit of fleeing at the sound, that, as the troop advanced riding easily, heads were hastily popped out of the white-washed cottages of Mossdale, where it sits blithely on the brae. There came a rush of white-headed bairns; then a goodwife who took the heather rather more reluctantly, like a motherly hen disturbed from off her comfortable nest; and then, last of all, followed the goodman, keeping well behind the yard dyke, and driving the family pig before him. For this picture, in sixteen hundred and eighty-nine, affords the exact estimate of the character and conduct of his Majesty's dragoons, which the experience of thirty years had taught the moorland folk of Galloway.

Yet in the present pacified state of the country these were doubtless troopers in the service of King William, and the old bad days gone for ever—that is from the point of view of the goodman of Mossdale. Nevertheless, with such a pig, that worthy man considered that it was well to run no risks.

But it was otherwise with Wat Gordon of Lochinvar. He had fought at Killiekrankie, and had twice been outlawed by the government of King William.

"Halt!" cried the officer in command to him; "whither-away riding so gaily, young sir?

"To the wedding at Balmaghie," Wat replied, tossing his lace kerchief, as if he had been a gallant shedding perfume over the Mall under the eyes of the maids-in-waiting.

"Your name and possessions?" continued the officer, noways inclined to be impressed by butterfly graces.

"I am Gordon of Gordonstoun—a kinsman of Alexander Gordon of Earlstoun, to whose house I presume you are going," replied Wat subtly. "This is, indeed, my cousin's warhorse on which I ride, if so be any of you are acquainted with him."

"Aye, by my faith, that do I all too well," said one of the troopers; "the uncanny devil came nigh to taking my arm off the other morning between his teeth, when I would have shifted him out of his stall to make room for the horse of your honour."

"Well done, Drumclog!" said Wat, leaning over and patting his neck, as easily as if he had been a councillor of the king himself, instead of a rebel twice attainted and mansworn.

"A good Cameronian horse," smiled the officer. "I thank you, laird of Gordonstoun, for your courteous answers. I would not keep you a moment from the bridal to which you go. Gay footing to you! I would it were mine to lead the dance this night with the maids of Balmaghie, and to drink the bride's stirrup-cup this morning."

"Aye," said Wat, "it is ndeed good to drink the loving-cup from the bride's fair hands. 'Tis to taste

it that I go. I have risen from a sickbed to do it."

"So my eyes tell me, brave lad," said the officer. "I trust your illness has not been grievous?"

"Nothing but what the bright eyes of a maid have power to cure!" cried Wat, looking back and waving his hand.

"Faith, right gallantly said," replied the officer; "with a tongue so attuned to compliment I will not detain thee a moment. 'Twere a pity such speeches should be wasted on a troop of His Majesty's dragoons."

So with a courteous wave of his hand the young captain swept northward, followed by his clanking troopers. And as he went little did he know his own escape from death, or guess that Wat Gordon, fingering at his sword and pistols so daintily and featly as he sat his horse, had in his mind the exact spot where the bullet would strike if it had chanced that any in the troop knew him for a rebel. For that light grip and easy swing of the sword indicated nothing less than a desperate resolve to cut his way singly through a whole command, rather than be stopped on his way to the bridal of Kate McGhie and my Lord of Barra.

A group of retainers stood irregularly about the outer gate of Balmaghie when Wat rode up. They greeted him with honour, one after another sweeping the ground with their plumed hats as they swerved aside to let him pass. But the ancient gardener stood open-mouthed, as if trying to recall a memory or fix a puzzling resemblance.

As Lochinvar rode through the glinting dewy woodlands he saw youths and damsels parading the glades in couples—keeping, however, their faces carefully towards the house for the signal that the bride was

coming. Already the bridegroom had arrived with his company, and, indeed, most of them were even now in the hall drinking prosperity and posterity to the wedding.

"Haste you, my lord," cried one malapert damsel to Wat, as he rode past a group of chattering minxes, "or you will be too late to win your loving-cup of luck from the hands of the bride, ere she goes to don her veil."

To her Wat Gordon bowed with his gayest air, and so passed by. The company was just coming out of the hall as he rode up. There, first of all, was my lady. Behind her came Roger McGhie, looking wan and frail, but carrying himself with his old dignity and gentle courtesy. And there, talking gaily to my lady, was Murdo, Lord of Barra, now proud and elate, having come to the height of his estate and with the cup of desire at his lip.

These three stopped dead when they saw the gay rider on the black horse, reining his steed at the foot of the steps of the house of Balmaghie. For a space they stood speechless. But the master of the house, Roger McGhie, it was who spoke first.

"'Tis a marvel and a pleasure to see you here, my Lord Lochinvar, on this our bridal day—a welcome guest indeed, if you come in peace to the house which once gave you shelter in time of need."

"Or come you to visit your ancient friends, who have not wholly cast you off, Lochinvar, though you have forgotten them?" added my lady, dimpling with a pleasure more than half malicious, on the broad terrace above him.

But Murdo of Barra said no word, as he stood on the upper steps gnawing his thin moustache, and talking aside to his groomsman as though that which

was happening below were but some trifling matter which concerned him not.

"Light down and lead the dance, my lord," said Roger McGhie courteously. "None like you, they say, can tread a measure, none so readily win a lady's favour—so runs the repute of you."

"I thank you, Balmaghie," answered Wat courteously; "but I came without invitation, without summons, to ask but that last favour—the loving-cup of good luck from the bride's fair hands ere I ride to meet my fate. For I must needs ride fast and far this day."

"It is well and knightly asked, and shall be granted," said Roger McGhie. "Bid Kate bring hither a loving-cup of wine for my Lord of Lochinvar, who bides her coming at the hall-door."

Black Murdo of Barra moved his hand impatiently.

"Let a bridesmaid fetch it," he said. "The bride is doubtless at her dressing and brooks not to be disturbed."

"Give me but the moment, and to you I leave the rest," said Walter Gordon, looking up at him with the light of a desperate challenge shining clear in his eye.

Then the maidens of the bridal standing about whispered eagerly to each other.

"Ah, that were a bridegroom indeed! See him sit in the saddle like a god—fitter for our bonny Kate than yon black, scowling Murdo."

Then out through the open doorway of the hall there came a vision of delight. The young bride came forth, clad in white, daintily slender, divinely fair. Not yet had she assumed her bridal veil. In simple white she moved, her hair rippling in sunlit curls to her neck, her maiden snood still for the last time binding it up. A silver beaker brimmed with the

red claret wine in her hand. And as she came bearing it in, the wedding guests opened a way for her to pass, murmuring content and admiration. Barra stepped forward as if to relieve her of the burden, but she passed him by as though she had not seen him.

Presently she stood at the side of Wat Gordon's charger, which looked back at her over his shoulder as though he, too, marvelled at her beauty.

The true lovers were met for the last time.

"Would that they need never part!" said a wise bridesmaid, leaning over and whispering to her mate. For their story was known, and all the young were very pitiful.

"Amen to that! Look at Murdo, how black and gash he glowers at them!" said her companion.

Wat Gordon took the cup and held it high in one brown gauntlet, still keeping the hand that gave it in his other.

"I pledge the bride—the bride and her own true love!" he said, loud enough for all to hear.

Then he drank and leaned towards Kate as though to return the cup with courteous salutation.

None heard the word he whispered. None save she who loved him can ever know, for Kate has not revealed it. But the word was spoken. The word was heard. A moment only the bride's eyes sought her lover's. The next his arm was about her waist, and her foot left the gravel with a spring airy as a bird's first morning flight. The reins were gathered in Wat's hand, his love was safe on the saddle before him. The spurs were set in Drumclog's dark flanks, the brave horse sprang forward, and before ever so much as a cry could go up from that watching assembly, Wat Gordon was riding straight for Dee water with his love between his arms.

CHAPTER LII

CATCH THEM WHO CAN!

FOR a space that concourse of marriage guests stood frozen with surprise and wonder. Then a hoarse cry arose from Black Murdo and his friends. With one accord they rushed for the stables; but some groom, eager to enjoy his holiday untrammelled at the wedding, had locked the doors. The key could not be found. The door must be broken down. Then what a cursing, shouting, striking of scullions ensued, Black Murdo in the midst raging like a fiend!

But all the while Kate was in the arms of her love, and the brave horse went rushing on, stealing mile after mile from the confusion of their foes. They were past the water of Dee, fording by the shallows of Threave, before ever a man of their pursuers was mounted at Balmaghie. On they rode towards the green-isleted loch of Carlinwark, at whose northern end they were trysted to meet with the Curate and Jean Gordon.

Soon Carlinwark's dappled square of blue gleamed beneath them as they surmounted the Wizard's Mount, and looked down upon the reeking chimneys of cottages lying snugly in the bield of the wooded hollow. Never slackening their speed on the summit, they rushed on—Drumclog going down hill among the rabbit-holes and thorn bushes as swiftly and surely as on level pavemented city street.

And there at last, by the Three Thorns of a thousand trysts, stood the Curate of Dalry, Peter McCaskill, and Jean Gordon by his side with a blue cloak over her arm. A little way behind them could be seen the brawny blacksmith of Carlinwark, Ebie Callan, his sledge-hammer in one hand and the bridle rein of a chestnut mare in the crook of his left arm.

There was as yet no sight or sound of pursuit behind them when they stayed Drumclog.

"Hurrah!" said the Curate, standing before Wat and Kate in his white cassock, and holding his service-book in his hand. "Are your minds made up? There is little time to lose, 'Dearly beloved, forasmuch,' and so on—"Walter Gordon of Lochinvar, do you take this woman whom you now hold by the hand (take her by the hand, man)"—so on and on he mumbled, rustling rapidly over the leaves of his book—"before these witnesses? And do you, Katherine McGhie, take this man?—very well then—'whom God hath joined . . .' There, that is finished, and 'tis as good a job as if it had been done by the Dean of Edinburgh. They cannot break Peter McCaskill's marrying work except with the dagger. And as to that, you must ride to save your skin, Wat, my lad."

"Mount upon this good steed, my lady," said the blacksmith to Kate; "she will carry you to Dumfries like the wind off the sea. She is faster than anything this side of the border."

And after she had mounted with Ebie Callan's gallant assistance, Jean Gordon cast the blue cloak about her.

"See and draw the hood decently about your head when ye come to the town-end o' Dumfries," she cried.

"And," said the Curate, "mind ye, Black Murdo has a double post-relay of horses prepared for his

MARRIAGE OF WAT AND KATE

bride and himself all the road to York, where the King is. Ebie has been ten days away through these outlandish parts layin' them doon. So ye can just say when ye get to the White Horse in the Vennel: 'The horses for my Lord of Barra and his Lady,' and there ye are! In the town of Dumfries they do not know Black Murdo frae Black Satan —nor care. And now away wi' ye! I hear them coming, but ye'll cheat them yet. There's nocht in the stables o' Balmaghie that can catch you and your bonny lady if ye keep clear o' moss-holes."

The pursuers were just topping the hill when the black and the chestnut were again put to their speed, and then, with a wave of the hand from Kate, and shake of his chevron-glove from Wat, the lovers were off on their long and perilous ride. The Curate stood looking after them a moment. Then, pulling his surplice over his head, he waved it frantically like a giant kerchief, murmuring the while: "The blessing o' the Almighty and Peter McCaskill be on ye baith!"—which was all the benediction that closed the marriage service of Wat Gordon and Kate McGhie.

Jean Gordon had turned aside to wipe her eyes, and the blacksmith stood staring after them with his mouth wider open than ever. As the pair surmounted the tangled hill of whins behind the little village of Causewayend, Wat looked down a moment from the highest part, but without checking his horses, in order to note the positions of his pursuers. Seeing this, the blacksmith became suddenly fired with enthusiasm. He lifted the mighty sledge which he had brought out in his hand and twirled it about his head.

"To the black deil wi' a' that wad harm ye or mar ye, ye bonny pair!" he shouted.

This was Ebie Callan's formula of blessing, and quite as serviceable in its way as that of the Curate.

But at that moment a horseman, coming at a hand gallop down the hill, broke through the thicket and rushed at speed between the Three Thorns almost upon Peter McCaskill and the smith. His horse reared and shied at the waving surplice and the threatening hammer. Whereupon the rider went over the pommel of his saddle and crashed all his length on the hard beaten path. When he regained his footing, lo! it was Black Murdo of Barra himself, and very naturally he rose in the fiercest of tempers.

He drew his sword and would have rushed upon the Curate, but that the blacksmith stepped in front with his sledge-hammer.

"Haud up, my man!" he exclaimed peremptorily, as if the Lord of Barra had been a kicking horse he had set himself to shoe; "stand back gin ye dinna want your pow cracked like a hazel-nut. Mind ye, Ebie Callan never missed a chap wi' the fore-hammer in his life."

At this point Peter McCaskill suddenly flapped his surplice in the face of Barra's horse, which flourished its heels and cantered away to meet its companions.

For by this time the other pursuers were beginning to come up, and seeing that nothing could be gained by delay, Barra called to one of these, whose horse he took, and delaying till a more convenient season any vengeance on Ebie Callan, once more set off in pursuit.

"Praise the Lord, they hae gotten a grand start. There's no' yin o' the vermin will come within a mile o' oor Wat on this side o' Dumfries whatever," affirmed the Curate.

"And what's mair," added the smith, "if he gets the horses I laid doon for my Lord, he will ride

into Carlisle with no' a McGhie or black hieland McAlister within miles o' him."

"Except the McGhie on the chestnut, said Peter McCaskill.

"And even she's a Gordon noo, if ye hae as good skill in your welding trade as I hae in mine," replied Ebie Callan, turning away to his smithy-bellows.

. . . . . .

It cannot be told at length in this already over-long chronicle in what manner Wat and Kate rode into Dumfries far ahead of their pursuers, or how they mounted on the horses prepared for Barra and his Countess, and went out amid the cheering of the populace. Nor is there room to relate how at each post they found, as Ebie had foretold, horses ever fresh and fresh, innkeepers obsequious, ostlers ready to delay all pursuers for a gold piece in hand as they rode off. Neither does it matter to the conclusion of the tale (which cannot long be delayed, though there would be pleasure in the prolonging of it), how they were assaulted by footpads at Great Salkeld, how Wat's blade played like summer lightning among them to the scatterment of the rascals, how Kate shot off a pistol and harmed nobody, how they rested three hours at Long Marten, and how Wat kept watch while Kate slept on the long brown heath of the fell betwixt Stainmoor and the Nine Standards at the entering in of Yorkshire.

These make a tale by themselves which ought to be told one day—but by a tale-teller unbreathed by a longer race than even that from the house of Balmaghie to the court which King William was holding in the city of York.

It is sufficient to say that without once being

sighted by their pursuers after they topped the hill beyond Carlinwark, Lochinvar and Kate, with thankful hearts, caught their first glimpse of the towers of York Cathedral, hull down in the broad plain, like the masts of a ship at sea.

CHAPTER LIII

WITHIN THE KING'S MERCY

As they came nearer to the city, they began to pass groups of country folk, all hastening in to see the glories of the court. For the King had come so far from his capital to receive the homage of his northern province, before departing to Ireland on the great campaign which was to make him unquestioned monarch of the Kingdoms three.

Soon Wat and Kate reached the ancient Bar which spanned the northern road by which they had ridden.

"Whither-away so fast?" cried the sentinel to them.

"From Scotland to see the King!" said Wat confidently, giving the man the salute in a manner only practised by the regiments in Holland.

"You are of His Highness's Scot regiments?" cried a much-surprised voice from the low doorway. "Of the Douglas Dragoons," replied Wat, over his shoulder.

"Pass—a gallant corps!" returned the officer of the guard, who had been watching, giving Wat back his salute in form, but, notwithstanding, keeping his eyes fixed upon Kate, whose head shone like a flower out of the blue deeps of the cape in which the rest of her beauty was shrouded.

As they rode more slowly on, several distinct streams of people all setting in one direction told

them without need of question in what place the King held his court. There were many strange folk to be seen about the ancient city that day. In front of the cathedral were encamped the King's Laplanders, each armed with a great two-handed sword, nearly as long as the owner (for they were little men of their stature), and wearing bear-skins over their black armour.

The splendid uniforms of the Prince's body-guard were also to be seen here and there. But it was not till they entered the wide grassy court of the castle that the full splendour of the scene was revealed to them.

Again and again they were challenged, but Wat's confident reply, "From Scotland to see the King!" together with his knowledge of the military etiquette in the Dutch army (and perhaps also in some measure the beauty of his companion), ensured him a free and courteous passage on every occasion.

As they rode into the courtyard of the castle the King was just coming out of a pavilion which had been erected to receive him. The gentlemen of his body-guard, in orange uniforms, and with brilliant armour upon their breasts, lined the square. The dignitaries of the province stood more uncertainly about.

Walter and Kate rode straight up to within twenty yards of the King. Then Wat dismounted and took his wife by the hand. She vaulted lightly to the ground. So, hand in hand, the pair of runaway lovers stood before the King.

William of Orange was a man valiant by nature. He had no fear of assassination. And so on this occasion he put aside one or two assiduous courtiers

who would have interposed between him and Lochinvar.

Wat stood with his hat in his hand, waiting for the King to put a question. But William of Orange was silent. It was the custom of his house that they never spoke the first word.

"Have I your Highness's leave to speak?" said Wat at last.

William looked him all over with his eagle eye.

"I have seen you before," he said; "you are the Scots officer who brought me the papers concerning the forces at Amersfort."

Wat bowed, and at once began his speech to the King.

"Your Highness," he said, "I am not here to ask a pardon for myself, but to claim your courteous protection for this lady—who is my wife."

The circle of dames and damsels who elbowed and rustled behind William, at this point manifested the greatest interest. Kate had let the hood of her cloak fall from her head, and now stood, with the simple white of her bridal dress, unsoiled even after her long journey, showing beneath it.

"I will speak freely to your Highness," said Wat, "asking no boon for myself. I am Walter Gordon of Lochinvar, in Galloway. Twice I am your outlaw—once according to the law of King James have I been an exile from my native land."

He spoke clearly and firmly, like one who will hide nothing.

The King bowed slightly, showing no more interest or animation than if he had been listening to the light gossip of the court.

"Because we two loved one another, I have carried off a bride from your Councillor of State, my Lord

Barra, that I might make her my wife. I escaped from your prison of Amersfort in order that I might rescue my love. I fought at Killiekrankie and Dunkeld—fought for King James, that I might win a way to her. For myself, therefore, I ask no mercy, and I expect none. But with confidence and unbound heart I place this lady, my wife, under the protection of your Highness, a prince just and clement—so that whatever happens she may not fall into the power of her enemy and mine, the Lord Barra, from whom and from death I have saved her this day!"

"And how did you save her?" said William, looking at him level-eyed, as one man looks at another whom he knows to be also a man.

"I went to the wedding to drink the bride's last loving-cup, and when the bride came to the hall door to speak with me I looked in her eyes once. Then I took her on my saddle-bow and rode away from among them all!" said Wat simply.

A little cheer fluttered out among the courtiers at this conclusion, and the ladies clapped their hands as at a play.

The King silenced them with a wave of his hand.

"And you expect——?" said William, and paused questioningly.

"I expect nothing, Prince of Orange!" said Wat boldly. "But I resolved to come to you, and tell you the worst! For I would rather have your justice than any other man's mercy—especially that of the men who rule for you in Scotland!"

The King shrugged his shoulders.

"Aye," he said. "I am with you there. I wish that stiff-necked country of yours were a thousand miles off and Duke Hamilton the King of it."

"You fought by my side at Calmthout, did you not?" he said suddenly, bending his piercing eyes on the young man.

Wat bowed, with a sudden access of pleasure shining on his face.

"And you saved the colours at Louvain," the King added.

Wat continued to hold his head down. William's memory was marvellous.

"You also brought the papers, relative to the manning and armament of the camp, out of the Inn of Brederode, wresting them from the French spies at the risk of your life. And I made you an officer for it."

He paused again, still smiling. Never was there a brave man so nobly clement as William of Orange.

"If I pardon you the double treason—and the prison-breaking," he added, a little thoughtfully, "will you command again for me—not a company this time, but a regiment?"

It was an offer noble, generous, worthy of the greatest prince.

The courtiers and the great folks assembled gave a shout, which was not checked this time.

The King still stood silent, smiling, expectant, confident of Wat's answer.

"My General, and your most noble Highness," began Lochinvar slowly, "but lately it would have been the greatest honour of my life to command a regiment in the service of the Prince of Orange. But I cannot command one in the service of William, King of England."

"Think again," said the King, who understood him, "I have regiments over seas as well as in England."

"But they might be needed here, and I could not

desert my colours a second time for loyalty, as once I did for love."

"What, then, do you desire?" said the King shortly, looking manifestly disappointed.

"Only your Highness's most noble clemency," replied Wat gravely, "the right to live quietly in mine own ancient tower, under the protection of your just and equal laws, giving my word of honour, if you will, never again to bear arms during your Highness's life."

"You have it, my Lord Lochinvar," said the King. "Gallantly you have won your bride. Wear her on your breast and keep her safe with the strength of your arm. I have lost me a good soldier and she has gotten her a good man."

Kate ran forward with a charmingly girlish gratitude, and kneeling, kissed the King's hand.

She looked about her to where Lochinvar stood. There was entreaty and command in her eye.

"It is the first thing I have ever asked of you as your wife!" she said, in a low voice.

For a moment he resisted Then Wat came forward, since his love had called him, and bending his knee he said, "I kiss your hand, most noble, most generous Prince."

"Rise, my Lord Lochinvar," replied the King; "keep your castle and your ancient loyalty, till your lands, and a ide in peace within your borders. I shall see that neither council nor councillor stir you. And as for my Lord of Barra, I have bidden him to confine himself to his own islands. He is no more councillor of mine. I have at last found the truth concerning the matter of the inn at Brederode."

So with a wave of his hand the King passed away. A great King he was, though even in that hour Wat

had named him no more than Prince. Then, as soon as he was gone, a swarm of courtiers surrounded Wat, and the ladies took Kate off to make much of her. For so great a marvel as the open carrying away of a bride on her marriage day with her own free will and consent had not been heard of in any land.

But when all was over, my Lord of Barra rode in, anxious and jaded with hard spurring; but the King turned his back on him.

"I know my friends at last," he said; "let me not see your face again, my Lord Barra. Ye have my leave to abide in your isles, if ye will."

But instead Barra betook himself forthwith to France, where he was received into great honour as a consistent favourer of the true King. He was killed at Steenkirk, as was fitting, leading a charge. For though a traitor, Murdo of Barra was a brave man.

EPILOGUE OF SUPEREROGATION

BEING CHAPTER FIFTY-FOURTH, AND LAST

PEACE and silence cinctured the ancient tower of Lochinvar like the blue circle of the vault of heaven. Kate and Wat were walking the battlements. It was a narrow promenade, but they kept the closer together. From the gable chimneys immediately above them, the blue perfumed reek of a peat fire went up straight as a monument. In the kitchen Jean Gordon and her tow-headed servitor, Mall, were preparing the evening meal. There, at the foot of the loch, could be seen Jack Scarlett switching his long fishing-pole, his boat and his figure showing black against the bright lake.

Wat shaded his face with his hand and looked under it, for the sun shot his rays slantwise.

"What is the matter with old Jack?" he said, "yonder he goes, pulling as hard as he can for the shore. I see two people sitting on a heather-tussock by the landing-place."

When Kate had looked once swiftly, she clapped her hands. "'Tis Maisie and Will!" she cried merrily. "Oh, I wonder if they have brought the babe?"

"The babe?" said her husband, "wherefore should they bring the babe, carrying him all the way from Earlstoun?"

"I should never let him out of my arms," cried Kate, "if I had such a boy."

She stopped somewhat suddenly and changed the subject.

"Look," she said, pointing with her finger, "Jack is showing them his fish. It is as well that he seems to have a good taking in his basket; for, faith! there is little in the house but salted black-faced mutton."

Long before the boat could approach near enough to the tower to render conversation possible, Kate and Maisie were crying out unintelligible greetings one to the other, while with his hand on her skirts Will Gordon endeavoured to induce his wife to sit down, lest she should overbalance herself and fall out of the boat.

Kate ran down the narrow turret stairs to the landing-place, whereupon Wat followed hastily, lest she should throw herself bodily into the water. The boat touched the wooden fenders, and the next moment the two women were in one another's arms. The men shook hands gravely, but said nothing, after their kind. Jack Scarlett took up his string of fish and departed kitchenwards without a word, keeping his eyes studiously on the ground.

Meanwhile the two women were sobbing quietly and contentedly, each on her friend's shoulder.

Then Will Gordon must needs turn and endeavour to cheer them with the eternal masculine tact.

"Why, lassies," he said, with loud joviality, "what can there be to cry about now, when everything has fallen out so well after all our troubles?"

His wife turned to him fiercely.

"You great gaby!" she cried pointedly, "get into the house and leave us alone. Can you not see we are just glad?"

"Yes—glad and happy!" corroborated Kate. 'What silly things men be!"

Wat and Will slunk off without a word. They did not so much as smile at the manner of the gladness of women. Even when they were safe in the square, oak-panelled hall, they seemed to have little to say to one another, except as to the crops on Gordonstoun and concerning the planting of trees at Will's new house of Afton.

Presently the women came back, whereupon, for no obvious reason, Wat and Will immediately plucked up heart and became suddenly voluble.

"Wat," said Kate, daring him to a refusal with her eyes, "I am going over to Earlstoun to-morrow to see the baby."

"What!" cried her husband, "why not fetch it here to-night? I will lead an expedition to bring it this very moment, and Scarlett and Will shall be my officers."

"*It*, indeed, you—you *man!*" cried Kate contemptuously. "Why, you could not be trusted with him."

"We might break it," said Will Gordon quietly, "or it might even cry, and then what should we do? Better is it that we should all return to the Earlstoun to-morrow. Sandy and Jean have gone to Afton for a while."

And so it was arranged, perhaps because of the last-mentioned fact.

But Kate cried out impetuously, after a silence of five minutes, "I do not believe that I can wait till to-morrow to see the lovely thing."

"No, nor I either!" said Maisie grievingly. She let her eyes rest a moment reproachfully on her husband, to convey to him that it was all his fault,

The two men looked at one another. Their glances of mutual sympathy said each to each: "This it is to be wedded."

"Well," said Wat, more cheerfully, like a man who knows it is vain to fight against his destiny, "let us all go there together to-night."

The women sprang up and clapped their hands.

"Scarlett," cried Kate, "ferry us across in the boat at once."

"What may be the great hurry?" he said. "The trouts are frying fine."

"We are going back to Earlstoun," said Kate, with decision in her tone.

"Is the auld hoose on fire, or what's a' the red-hot haste?" called Scarlett from the kitchen, where he was superintending the sprinkling of oatmeal on the trouts—a delicate operation.

"Man, the bairn may be greeting!" said Will Gordon; whereat Wat Gordon suddenly laughed aloud—and then just judgment seemed about to descend upon them. But their several wives looked at each other to decide which should be the executioner. "After all," said the four eyes as they took counsel, "is it worth it?" It was enough that they were *men*—nothing could be expected of that breed, when it came to a matter of the finer feelings.

Jean Gordon came anxiously panting up the stairs.

"You will be the better o' your suppers afore ye gang ony sic roads at this time of night," she said determinedly.

So in a trice the trouts were brought in, and Scarlett sat down along with Lochinvar and his guests, for such was the sweet and honourable custom of the tower.

Then in the beauty of a late and gracious

gloaming, they rowed over softly to the blossoming heather of the lochside, and took their way by two and two up the hill. The two women walked on in front in whispered sibylline converse, sometimes looking over their shoulders to ensure that their husbands did not encroach too closely upon the mysteries.

At the top of the hill Wat and Kate with one instinct stopped a moment and looked down upon the peace of their moorland home. Jack Scarlett was dragging a rod across the loch from the stern of the returning boat. Jean Gordon and Mall, her maid, were setting the evening fire to "keep in" till the morning. The topmost chimney still gave forth a faint blue "pew" of peat-reek, which went straight up into the still night air and was lost among the thickening spear-points of the stars.

Kate took her husband's arm.

"Are you sorry, Wat?" she said, with something like the dew of tears in her voice, "that you gave up the command of a regiment to come to this quiet place—and to me?"

In the hearing of his cousin Wat only smiled at her question, but privately he took possession of his wife's hand, and kept it in his all the way as they went down the hill, till they came through the Earlstoun wood past the tree in which Sandy had hidden so long. But at the well-house gate Kate suddenly dropped Wat's hand, and she and Maisie darted simultaneously towards the great doorway of Earlstoun.

Their husbands stood petrified.

"There is baby crying, after all! Did I not tell you?" cried Kate and Maisie together, looking reproachfully at each other as they ran.

Wat and Will were left alone by the curb of the well-house of Earlstoun; they clasped hands silently in the dusk of the gloaming and looked different ways. And though they did not speak, the grip of their right hands was at once a thanksgiving and a prayer.

THE END

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